

The Effects of Adult Involvement on Children Participating in Organised Team Sports

Simon Walters ^a, Philip Schluter ^{b, c, d}, Rex Thomson ^e, and Deborah Payne ^f.

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^a AUT University, School of Sport and Recreation, Auckland, NEW ZEALAND,

^b AUT University, School of Public Health & Psychosocial Studies, Auckland, NEW ZEALAND,

^c The University of Queensland, School of Nursing and Midwifery, QLD 4072, AUSTRALIA,

^d University of Otago, Department of Public Health and General Practice, Christchurch, NEW ZEALAND

^e Unitec, School of Sport, Auckland, NEW ZEALAND,

^f AUT University, School of Health Care Practices, Auckland, NEW ZEALAND.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AUTEC	Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
CET	Coach Effectiveness Training Program
CI	Confidence Interval
GACU	The Greater Auckland Coaching Unit
NSO	National Sporting Organisation
NZRU	New Zealand Rugby Union
POISE	Parents' Observation Instrument at Sporting Events
SPARC	Sport and Recreation New Zealand
RSO	Regional Sporting Organisation
RST	Regional Sports Trust
TGfU	Teaching Games for Understanding
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America

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Abstract

There are clearly identified social, physical, and mental health benefits of physical activity in primary aged children. With an unequivocal link between sport and physical activity, it would appear to be fundamentally important that children are encouraged to participate in sporting activities. Parents and coaches have been acknowledged as key influences in their children's uptake, enjoyment, and ongoing participation in sport. However, concerns have been commonly expressed in the media, both in New Zealand and internationally, about inappropriate sideline behaviour displayed by adults at children's sporting events. In spite of this, few studies have examined the nature and effect of parental or coaching behaviour at children's sporting events. In addition, although young children's views are increasingly becoming seen to be important, relevant and valuable, there is no evidence in the peer-reviewed literature of New Zealand based research that has been undertaken with children in this area.

Using a scientifically robust epidemiological design and observation instrument, a key aim of this research was to benchmark the prevalence of various coaching behaviours at children's (aged 6 to 11 years) events for four major sports (rugby union, touch rugby, soccer, and netball). Utilising a mixed-methods approach, another key aim of this research was to give voice to sporting administrators, parents, children, referees/umpires, and coaches about the effects of parental behaviours at children's sporting fixtures.

The findings presented in this study provide prevalence and patterns of verbal coach behaviour from 72 sporting fixtures not previously recorded in New Zealand. In total, 10,697 coach comments were recorded at, on average, 3.71 (95% CI: 3.64, 3.79) comments/minute. The coaching behaviours recorded did not always reflect a nurturing, positive, developmentally-appropriate approach to the coaching of children's team sports. Of the total number of comments recorded, 35.4% were categorised as positive,

21.6% as negative, and 43% as neutral. Significant differences in the distribution of comments were found between sports, with rugby union coaches recording the lowest percentage of positive comments and the highest percentage of negative comments. The percentage of negative comments aimed at umpires and officials was higher in touch rugby and in rugby union than in netball and soccer.

The discursive analysis employed in this study revealed the dominance of a sport as competition discourse that would appear to serve the needs more of over-competitive coaches and parents than the needs of children. For children, being treated equally and fairly is a primary concern. Children enjoy competition, but appear to be able to put winning into perspective. There is pressure on children, through disciplinary measures, to conform to the normative behaviours associated with an adult-controlled version of sport.

The results of this research provide an evidence-base to inform policy and the development of interventions with regions and nationally; evidence which may also be applicable to other developed countries. Until a child-centred approach to coaching is routinely adopted across all sports, the sometimes extremely negative perceptions of children's sport will remain.

SECTION 1: Introduction

The childhood years have been highlighted as a crucial time when ongoing participation in physical activity can be nurtured and maintained. The nurturing of a child's proclivity to participate in physical activities normally falls into the domain of adults. Parents have been identified as key influences in children's enjoyment of sport (Jowett & Cramer, 2010; Shields, LaVoi, Bredemeier, & Power, 2007; Woolger & Power, 1993). There are many positive aspects of parental involvement on a child's experiences in sport. For example, parents are a key determinant for a child's commitment to physical activity and a source promoting enjoyment, physical competence and feelings of self-worth (Hamstra, Cherubini, & Swanik, 2002). Parental influences are extremely important determinants of physical activity behaviours of young children but there has been increasing concern over the apparent decreasing physical activity levels of both New Zealand children and adults (Kolt et al., 2005).

In addition to parents, coaches also play a significant role in children's enjoyment of organised sports (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). Coaches are ideally placed to foster positive athletic environments that not only promote skill development but also nurture the psychosocial development and overall well-being of the athletes in their care (Smoll & Smith, 2006). Coaches have been identified as important motivational influences for young children, and positive coach behaviours have been shown to enhance a child's enjoyment of sport (Allen & Hodge, 2006; Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavalley, 2009; Smith et al., 2007).

However, some negative perceptions exist about the sometimes excessive role played by both parents and coaches. Concerns are commonly expressed in the media about excessive parental and parent-coach touchline behaviour; see, for example, Rattue (2006) and Harris (2006) in New Zealand, and Harrison (2007) in the UK. There is also

evidence of concern from the academic literature about the nature and degree of parental and coach involvement in organised sport for children (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001; Engh, 1999; Kidman, McKenzie, & McKenzie, 1999; Smoll & Cumming, 2006). Reports of excessive parental behaviour at children's sporting events are not uncommon (Kidman et al., 1999; Omli & La Voi, 2009). To minimise these negative elements, it has been claimed that parents and coaches need a better understanding of the impact of their own behaviour, to be better equipped to moderate their actions and comments, to establish and maintain appropriate levels of involvement, and to ensure that they foster positive, enjoyable sporting experiences for their children (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2006; Kidman et al., 1999; Stein, Raedeke, & Glenn, 1999).

For many young people it would appear that competitive, regulated, organised sport is increasingly holding less appeal; as evidenced by decreasing numbers of young people participating in organised sports (Petchlikoff, 1995; Thomson, 2000). There have been calls for organised sports to become more child centred; to move away from adult-oriented goals to child-oriented goals (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001; Kraus, 2006).

A number of New Zealand researchers have expressed concerns about young children's sporting experiences. As early as the 1970s, Williams (1974) noted that at the 1974 General Assembly of the International Federation of Sports Medicine in Melbourne, there was "considerable concern about the strong emphasis that has come to be placed upon highly structured sports competition for young children" (p. 17). Thomson (1993, 1996a, 1996b, 2000), also, has consistently expressed concerns about the potentially damaging effects of the increasingly competitive nature of organised sport for pre-adolescents. Pope (2006) voiced similar misgivings over the adult-

controlled versions of sport that existed which had a tendency to diminish, rather than enhance, children's motivations to continue participating in organised sport. Grant and Pope (2004) conducted a project commissioned by Sport Waikato to examine sideline behaviour in children's sport. The study focused on sideline behaviour at children's (aged 5 to 18 years) organised sporting events in the Waikato region of New Zealand and found that the sporting experience of the majority of children was positive, although not free from undesirable sideline behaviour. The impact of the negative comments recorded did, however, appear to impact not only on children's enjoyment of sport but also their desire to continue participating.

Kidman and colleagues conducted similar observational research of sideline behaviour in the Dunedin area of New Zealand and found that the relatively high percentage of negative comments made by parents gave cause for ongoing concern (Kidman & McKenzie, 1996; Kidman et al., 1999). Subsequently, Kidman has been a consistent advocate for coaching practices that are more child-centred, focus on the enjoyment of the child, the enhancement of independent decision-making processes, and the long term development of skill (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010). However, there is no evidence that New Zealand researchers have continued to build upon the work conducted by both Kidman and Pope. With evidence that (i) an increased competitive framework, and (ii) negative adult behaviour experiences are important drivers (amongst others) which may contribute to the decline in participation rates in sport (Kidman et al., 1999; Thomson, 2000), there would appear to be a clear need for further New Zealand specific research in this area.

SECTION 2: Aims and Objectives

This study focuses on adult behaviours at children's (ages 6 to 11 years) organised sporting events. The team sports that are the focus of this research are rugby union, netball, soccer, and touch rugby. These team sports were selected because of their high participation rates amongst New Zealand children for both females (netball, soccer, touch rugby) and males (rugby union, touch rugby, soccer) (Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2005).

There were a number of overall aims that were associated with this study. Due to the anecdotal nature of much of the evidence to date relating to adult behaviour at children's sporting events in New Zealand, it was important to provide empirical evidence to provide a benchmark for these behaviours. It was also important to explore the impact of the identified behaviours on the key stakeholders associated with children's sport.

Aims

The aims of this study are to:

- identify the nature of adult behaviour at children's sporting events;
- establish the prevalence of these behaviours at children's sporting events;
- examine the effect of adult behaviours on the key stakeholders involved in children's sport; and
- explore the impact of adult behaviours on children's enjoyment of sport.

Objectives

The key objectives of this research are to employ rigorous, robust contemporary scientific methods and epidemiological principles to:

- provide important yet hitherto unknown benchmark figures on the type and prevalence of various adult behaviours;
- examine the influence of potential predictive variables on the positive and negative comments made by adults; particularly sport, athlete age, adult gender, and game result;
- provide empirical data on the impact these behaviours have on the key stakeholders;
- heighten awareness of the impact of parental behaviour on the key stakeholders involved in children's sport;
- disseminate findings not only to academic audiences, but also to individuals and organisations involved with the administration of children's sport in New Zealand; and
- promote discussion and ultimately inform appropriate intervention and policy decisions.

SECTION 3: Literature Review

This review briefly examines the literature pertinent to the influences of adult involvement in children's sport, with a specific focus on the sideline behaviour of adult parents and coaches, and the impact of these behaviours on children participating in sport.

Children's Enjoyment of Sport

Concerns have been expressed about children's organised sport experiences for some considerable time. Originally published in 1975, the book *Every Kid Can Win* was motivated by the authors' concerns about the damage caused by win-at-all-costs behaviours exhibited by teachers, parents, and coaches (Orlick & Botterill, 1975). Interviews with children showed that children played sport primarily for fun and for the action. As sport became more serious, these children clearly indicated that they did not like being yelled at, getting little game-time, or feeling as though they were failures. The authors also cited evidence that showed that children, as they grew older, were already withdrawing from a range of organised sports.

Concern over attrition rates in children's sport has been ongoing for researchers, and a number of studies have focused on children's attrition rates and reasons for withdrawing from sport. However, conflicting evidence has emerged (Gould, 1987/2007; Weiss & Amorose, 2008) and many of these studies have focused on the older teenage age group. Children appear to have multiple reasons for either participating or deciding not to participate in organised sports (Biddle, 1999), and Gould (1987/2007) noted that other larger scale studies (for example Sapp & Haubenstricker, 1978) have suggested that children may temporarily withdraw from sport, engage with other sports, or withdraw for reasons that differ from the more

negative ones referred to by Orlick and Botterill (1975). Although there are a range of reasons as to why children withdraw from sport, studies have consistently shown to varying degrees that a lack of fun, an over-competitive sporting environment, and perceived low levels of competence are regular contributing factors to early withdrawal (Gould, 1987/2007).

Parental Influences

Although parents have been identified as key influences determining the level and quality of involvement of their children in sport (Clark, 2008; Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007), there have been few studies that have monitored and examined the actual effect of parental behaviour at children's sporting events (Kidman et al.1999). International media coverage relating to parental involvement has tended to be sensationalist in nature, but some quite disturbing stories have been revealed. An Australian publication published details of some of the more extreme cases that have occurred (Ugly Parent Syndrome, 2002). Probably the most extreme relates to a Boston, Massachusetts father, who in 2000 used hockey sticks to beat another father, with the victim subsequently dying from his injuries. Another case related to a father who was banned from attending four of his 8 years old son's football games and forced to undergo counselling sessions after swearing at and slapping a **junior** volunteer umpire at one of his son's games. Similar stories have been reported in New Zealand including a recent account of a Dunedin father who was convicted for punching a man for swearing at an under-10 years rugby union match (Otago Daily Times, 2010). It is not only the parental spectator behaviour which is attracting media attention, as highlighted by an Auckland journalist:

While taking part in an over-30s training in Auckland a few years ago, I watched in horror as the man labelled as the coach of a tiny soccer team berated his

charges to the point that you wondered why any of those kids would ever turn up again (Rattue, 2006, p. C15).

There would appear to be increasing media concern over what is deemed to be inappropriate and excessive parental touchline behaviour in many countries, including the US, Australia, the UK, and New Zealand. However, there are few studies which have measured the extent and prevalence of this behaviour.

Elite Sport

A number of studies have supported the theory that parental support plays a significant role in a child's ongoing participation and performance in higher level sport. A study of the four families of three elite junior rowers and an elite junior tennis player (aged 18 years) examined the retrospective accounts of family members in relation to parenting practices (Côté, 1999). Côté divided the development stages of these athletes into the sampling years (ages 6 to 13 years), the specialising years (ages 13 to 15 years), and the investment years (ages 15 and over). Côté found that the families of these elite athletes were predominantly supportive of their child participating in a range of sports during the sampling years, and put no undue pressure on them as they progressed through the specialising and investment years.

Evidence relating to the more negative aspects of parental behaviour tended to emerge as children moved into their teenage years. Lauer et al. (2010) found that the more controlling negative parental behaviours, such as putting expectations on children, seemed to occur during the specialising years. The complexity of the parent-child relationship was acknowledged by Power and Woolger (1994), who noted that the balance between parental pressure and parental support was a difficult one to measure,

but noted that the setting of unrealistic performance goals by parents could have detrimental effects on a child's motivation.

The focus of many of the studies on elite athletes has naturally tended to be on the significance of parental influences on achievement, as opposed to children's enjoyment of sport. However, the consensus across these studies was that parents of successful athletes generally created an enjoyable, positive, supportive, and varied environment during the early years of their child's sporting development. Parents either became more controlling or withdrew completely as their child moved into adolescence.

Although a number of studies with elite athletes have indicated that these athletes appear to benefit from exposure to a range of sports in their early years, there are also supporters of Ericsson's (2003) recommendation for early specialisation in one sport involving up to 10,000 hours of deliberate practice (Helsen, Hodges, Van Winckel, & Starkes, 2001; Helsen, Starkes, & Hodges, 1998). Côté, Horton, MacDonald, and Wilkes (2009) compared the benefits of this early specialisation with the sampling of a range of sports during childhood. Côté et al. noted that not only did studies of elite athletes suggest that exposure to a broad range of sports was beneficial to long term athlete development, but also that this exposure was more enjoyable for children. Early specialisation was intensive, could lead to boredom, and burnout or complete withdrawal from sport.

Parents as Negative Influences

Although there are many positive parental influences on children participating in sport, unfortunately, children's sporting experiences can also include more negative ones such as perceived stress, lower self-esteem, and amotivation (Woolger & Power, 1993). The impact of the parent on the stress, anxiety, and motivational levels of children playing sport has been examined in a range of studies (Barber, Sukhi, & White,

1999; Conroy, 2001; Hamstra et al., 2002). Conroy (2001) noted that much of the research conducted by sport psychologists had focused on issues relating to performance enhancement. Whilst the enhancement of sporting performance is of understandable interest to sports researchers, Conroy (2001) acknowledged an obvious need to focus on the perspective of the child and advocated the nurturing of a child's holistic development through sport, with potential benefits not only for a child's physical health and emotional well-being, but also for overall social development.

Parents' demands, family structure, and parent-child communications have been identified as key factors in the development of a fear of failure for children (Conroy, 2001). Infants begin life with little fear of failure, but as they progress through childhood, the consequences of failure become apparent (e.g., from forms of punishment such as criticism), and based on their experiences children display varying degrees of a fear of failure (Conroy, Coatsworth, & Kaye, 2007). The stress and anxiety associated with this fear of failure can be potentially extremely damaging to a child's social development (Conroy, 2001). The study by Conroy et al. (2007) found evidence of sport performance anxiety, a fear of failure, and associated feelings of low self-esteem in female athletes as young as eight years of age.

Excessive Parental Behaviour

Frankl (2004) explored the impact of excessive parental behaviour at children's sporting events in the US and noted that reports of inappropriate and violent behaviour by adults were on the increase. Although concerns are often expressed about the excesses of parental behaviour in children's sport, there still remain relatively few studies that have observed and recorded these behaviours. The earlier studies that were conducted (Graham, Ratliffe, Faucette, Salter, & Walley, 1982; Randall & McKenzie, 1987; Walley, Graham, & Forehand, 1982) indicated that parent spectators were not

overly verbal at their children's games. Subsequent studies (Blom & Drane, 2008; Kidman et al., 1999) concluded that the significant amount of instruction provided by parents from the touchline, and their level of negative comments recorded, did give rise for concern. The authors of both of these later studies highlighted the need for further research to establish more accurately the nature and prevalence of parental behaviours, with Kidman et al. calling for interventions to educate and inform parents on how to provide a more supportive and positive sporting experience for their children.

One account by Fiore (2003) tracked the development of youth sport in the US. Fiore (2003, p. 104) referred to the "epidemic" of incidents of "parental rage" and believed that the traditional and self regulated backyard games once played by children began, in the 1950s, to be replaced by structured, competitive activities and leagues. Although the introduction of leagues was originally well intentioned, Fiore believed that these leagues came to be characterised by increasingly high degrees of parental control and by incidents of inappropriate and often violent behaviour. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the organisation of children's sport increasingly reflects the structures of adult professional sport, as opposed to being designed to meet the needs of the children themselves (Engh, 1999). The outcome of this highly regulated, competitive, structured approach is the development of a win-at-all-costs mentality for parents and coaches, which eventually filters down and is embodied in the behaviours of the children themselves (Schuette, 2001).

A behaviour related to the adoption of this win-at-all-costs mentality is verbal aggression, which has been identified as having a major detrimental effect on young athletes, especially if they are subjected to this behaviour over long periods of time (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). The negative impact of verbal aggression is not only felt by the target, but there is evidence to suggest that regular exposure to background anger

is equally distressing for all children witnessing these types of behaviours (Cummings, 1987; Omli & La Voi, 2009).

The Influence of the Coach

It has been widely recognised that coaches hold considerably influential positions over children's enjoyment and ongoing commitment to sport (Jowett & Cramer, 2010; Woolger & Power, 1993). Jones (2007) highlighted the tendency for the field of coaching science to focus on delivery style and the transmission of specialised knowledge, at the expense of a more meaningful examination of the potential of the pedagogical nature of coach-athlete relationships. Jones further called for coaching to become a truly pedagogical profession, focusing on the unpredictable micro-relationships that occur between coach and athlete, which would enhance the experience for all athletes and also enhance the learning process. There has been a tendency for coaching to be presented simply as the art of imparting knowledge, with little regard for the significance of the complex interactions and subsequent human relationships that exist between coaches and athletes (Jones, 2009).

However, in New Zealand, as elsewhere, the delivery of children's sport relies heavily on the parent volunteer (Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2010b), and it has been claimed that many youth sport coaches receive little or no appropriate training (Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). With children's experiences of organised sport so heavily dependent upon the behaviour of untrained volunteer coaches, aligned with a recognition of the complex nature of the art of coaching itself (Jones, 2009), it is perhaps not surprising that the behaviour of coaches in children's sport has aroused considerable concern. The reliance of coaches on simply instructing and telling children what to do, has given rise to concerns about not only the affects constant instruction has on effective learning and on the development of

autonomous decision-making skills, but also on a child's enjoyment of sport (Kidman et al., 1999).

Although much of the coaching literature has focused on the older teenage or competitive elite athlete, there appears to be overwhelming evidence that coaches who adopt a caring attitude towards athletes in their care and acknowledge the feelings and needs of these athletes, are more able to nurture an environment where athletes can reach their potential (Jones, 2009). Caring coaches can also facilitate a climate that encourages children to become more autonomous, intrinsically motivated, and develop greater decision making capabilities than those athletes exposed to a more controlled environment where they are exposed to little choice (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

A number of studies have shown that it is possible to change coach behaviour. The considerable work conducted by Smith and Smoll, in particular, has been successful in changing coach behaviours to enhance children's sporting experiences. Smith and Smoll have reportedly run workshops delivering the Coach Effectiveness Training programme (CET) to over 13,000 youth sport coaches, with evidence that as a consequence young players reported higher levels of enjoyment and self-esteem (Smith & Smoll, 1997; Topor & Gill, 2008).

As there is little evidence to suggest that volunteer coaches involved in children's sport receive formal training, it is unsurprising that they have inadequate knowledge of the psychological and psychosocial developmental needs of children (Tofler & Butterbaugh, 2005). As a consequence, Tofler and Butterbaugh noted that many coaches are outcome-driven and physically and verbally embody a harsh punitive coaching style. The findings of studies conducted with youth sport coaches show that coaches themselves acknowledge that they receive little coaching education and training (McCallister, Blinde, & Kolenbrander, 2000; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). Wiersma and

Sherman suggested that coaches are keen to receive coaching education and training, despite the time constraints that attendance at training programmes would impose. Furthermore, these coaches acknowledged the significant impact that their own behaviour had on both children and their parents who attended games.

Although there would appear to be a range of factors that influence children's ongoing commitment to sport, what consistently emerges from the literature is that children today, as they did forty years ago, participate in sport primarily for fun and enjoyment (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1988).

SECTION 4: Methodology

As the focus of this study was to try and achieve a better understanding of the effects of adult behaviour on the child participating in organised sport, a mixed methods study was considered to be the preferred approach. As noted by Bryman (2004), mixed methods “may provide a better understanding of a phenomenon than if just one method had been used” (p. 464).

This study draws upon Foucault’s concepts of discourse and power to analyse the relationships between children and the key stakeholders involved in children’s sport. These were identified as being coaches, parents, administrators, referees, and most importantly the children themselves. A number of sporting studies have drawn upon Foucault’s notions of discourse, power, and conformity to understand how athletes seemingly readily conform to what are often the excessively punishing normative practices associated with competitive sport. Some examples of these studies include a study on high performance adult wrestlers, swimmers, gymnasts, and track athletes (Johns & Johns, 2000); a study of competitive youth swimmers (Lang, 2010); and a study on adult women rugby union players (Chase, 2006). To continue participating in elite level sport, it appeared that athletes were prepared to accept, and at times excuse, the sometimes abusive behaviour of coaches they had encountered (Johns & Johns, 2000). The exposing of normative social practices opens them up for discussion and further analysis. This was one of the overall aims of this study, to try and expose what was perceived as normal adult behaviour in the context of children’s organised sport, and why it was perceived that way. As a consequence, a Foucauldian informed discourse analysis appeared to be the optimal approach to adopt in the qualitative components of this study.

As this study adopted a mixed-methods approach with five sub-studies, the specific methods adopted in each sub-study are detailed in the relevant sections of this report. The aim of this study was to explore the perspectives of key stakeholders to elicit a broader understanding of issues pertaining to children's sport. The quantitative components were designed to provide empirical information relating to the nature and prevalence of adult behaviours. These components directly related to the following aims of this study (re-stated):

- to identify the nature of adult behaviour at children's sporting events;
and
- to establish the prevalence of these behaviours at children's sporting events.

The qualitative components were designed to address the aims:

- to examine the effect of adult behaviours on the key stakeholders involved in children's sport; and
- to explore the impact of these behaviours on children's enjoyment of sport.

The research components included in the initial design of the study were as follows:

1. A focus group interview with administrators involved with each of the four team sports.
2. A structured observational study of parents observing children's sporting events.

The aim of this study was to use the Parents' Observation Instrument at Sports Events (POISE) to record the frequency and nature of parent comments.

However, the initial design approach adopted was flexible and the design of POISE was later adapted to observe coaches – who in children’s sport are predominantly parents.

3. Surveys to be completed by children (ages 6 to 11 years) and their parents/caregivers.
4. Focus group interviews with children (ages 6 to 11 years).
5. Surveys to be completed by coaches and referees/umpires.

Ethical Considerations

Full ethical approval to proceed with this study was granted on 20th June 2007 by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee - AUTECH. With the exception of coaches who were observed (discussed below), all participants provided fully informed consent (and in the case of children, assent).

Covert Observation

One aspect of this study that did arouse considerable ethical debate was the use of covert observation to record the behaviours of adults at children’s sporting matches. Careful thought was given to the ethical implications of using a covert observation instrument. However, covert observation appeared to be the optimal approach for this research.

A key aim of this study was to identify the nature and prevalence of adult behaviours at children’s sporting events in New Zealand. The POISE is a published instrument that has been designed and previously employed to measure such adult behaviour. Other methods utilised in this study are able to explore the effects of behaviour, but are not able to reliably determine prevalence rates. The Hawthorne effect is well documented and relates to a phenomenon where a study subject’s behaviour alters as a direct consequence of the subject becoming aware they are being observed

(Eckmanns, Bessert, Behnke, Gastmeier, & Rüdén, 2006; Mangione-Smith, Elliot, McDonald, & McGlynn, 2002). In this instance it was believed that awareness of observation would significantly influence a participant's behaviour.

All covert observation was to be conducted in public places. During the 80 team games to be observed, adult coaches were selected for observation. At no time before, during, or after the observation was the identity of the observed known or recorded by the researchers. Neither was any potentially identifying information (such as age, ethnicity, appearance or mannerisms) collected. The instrument was used to record the prevalence, nature and target of comments made by each subject under study. There was no audio or video recording of the subject whatsoever.

Although the observation of coaches that took place in this study was covert, the sporting organisations responsible for the administration of each of the team sports were fully informed of the nature of the study. Each organisation provided permission for their coaches to be observed, and preliminary reports of the findings were distributed to each of the organisations on completion of the study.

SECTION 5: Sporting Administrators

Introduction

This section presents the findings of a focus group that was conducted with sport administrators representing each of the four team sports that were the focal point of this study (rugby union, soccer, touch rugby, and netball).¹ There were two primary reasons for the decision that the focus group interview with sport administrators would represent the first phase of this investigation. First, it was felt that sport administrators were uniquely placed to offer an insight into the issue of sideline behaviour in children's sports. Administrators involved with the governance and organisation of children's sport in a region need to deal with a number of groups and individuals at a broad range of levels. These can include National Sporting Organisations (NSOs), Regional Sporting Organisations (RSOs), clubs and their representatives, coaches, referees/umpires and parents. Administrators are responsible for the implementation of the competition structures and rules that constitute their sport; and for the implementation of coaching and refereeing guidelines. They also deal with complaints from clubs, referees, and parents about any issues that arise. Second, this initial work with administrators helped begin a relationship with their organisations which would support the implementation of subsequent phases of this study.

Methods

This qualitative phase of the study drew upon Foucauldian notions of discourse analysis to analyse a focus group interview conducted with sport administrators. The target population for this study were sport administrators involved in the organisation

¹ An article based on the findings of the focus group analysis was submitted and accepted for publication with the European Journal for Sport and Society (Walters, Payne, Schluter, & Thomson, 2010).

and coordination of children's (ages 6 to 11 years) team sports in two districts in the Greater Auckland area.

Participants

A process of purposive sampling was utilised to identify eight sports administrators, drawn from RSOs and a Sports Trust responsible for the coordination and delivery of the four team sports that were the focus of this study. The criteria used to select participants were that they were primarily involved in children's (ages 6 to 11 years) sport, and had experience working with a range of stakeholders including club representatives, managers, referees, coaches, and parents.

All eight administrators were extremely keen to participate, although due to competing commitments it was only possible to bring five participants together for the focus group meeting. One participant represented rugby union (male), one participant represented a sports trust coordinating touch rugby and soccer (female), two participants represented netball (male and female), and another participant represented soccer (female).

Conducting the Focus Group Interview

One focus group meeting of 100 minutes was conducted. Participants were asked to describe their experiences, both positive and negative, of parental involvement in sport. The aim was to gain an insight into the processes that influence parental behaviour in relation to children's sport. The focus group meeting was audio tape recorded and transcribed with fully informed consent for all aspects of this research having been provided by all participants.

Theoretical Framework

The term discourse, in the context of this study, refers to Foucault's idea of discourse as opposed to the purely linguistic meaning more commonly applied to the

term, especially in relation to discourse analysis. Foucault (1969/2002, p. 54) speaks of discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”. Thus social practices and ways of thinking are produced and given meaning by discourse.

Competing Discourses in Children’s Sport

Three dominant discourses emerged from the analysis which produce a network of power relationships and may influence a child’s sporting experience. The three dominant discourses deployed by the participants were related to: sport as a developmental vehicle; a competitive discourse; and sport as fun. These discourses result in three different and competing constructions of sport: sport as a means of long-term athlete development; sport as winning; and sport as a source of fun.

Sport and Long-term Athlete Development

Participants spoke of children’s sport as playing a key role primarily in the development of a child as a long term player of the sport. This discourse is revealed in the following excerpt:

Rugby: [...] if we are selfish as a rugby union we want ALL the kids playing the game to learn all the skills and to be in a position when they go to secondary school and beyond to actually continue playing...

[...]

Netball: [...] teach the kids to love the game, enjoy it and stick with it for life

Here the child is constructed as an athlete who will progressively develop the skills necessary to be a competent player of the game. It is hoped in turn that this will encourage ongoing participation and commitment to the game. A nurturing aspect emerges here where a child-centred approach to coaching is advocated, which takes into consideration the physical, social and emotional development of the child. Much of the

individual sports' coaching literature advocates a similar philosophical position. Netball New Zealand's first stated objective in their guidelines for junior netball to "provide the best possible experiences for all young netballers in order to encourage lifelong participation" (Netball New Zealand, 2008, p. 2) is a typical example. It is interconnected with the fun discourse (explained below), getting the children to love and enjoy the game, but in essence what emerges is a desire to develop better players who in turn will contribute to the long term development of their respective sports. By nurturing a love for the game, there is the added benefit that children will stay with that sport as they get older. The more people who continue to be involved with a particular sport, the stronger that sport will become.

Sport as Competition

Participants also spoke of sport as a competitive activity. The following excerpt illustrates how coaches and parents who are heavily influenced by this competitive discourse can shape a child's experience of sport.

Touch Rugby: Parents and coaches can be very competitive, especially if it is the parents' first experience with their children in the sport. They come in very competitive thinking that the win is all that matters. It's when a lot of the one-eyed business comes in and parents' willingness to bend the rules to suit their child or the outcome of the game is incredible.

Rugby: There was an issue with one of the coaches I spoke to and he sort of said to me "I started playing [the better] guys for longer and longer because we wanted to win".

Here the touch rugby administrator is referring to experiences associated with sport for children aged 5 and 6 years. Already the 'win' is all important. From a parent or coach influenced by this competitive discourse, the child's long term development as a player is secondary to the short term goal of winning each game. The administrators

attributed much of the excessive behaviour they were concerned about to parents or coaches who viewed sport as a competitive activity with the primary outcome of winning. This focus on winning condones or creates the space for manipulation of the rules. The construction of sport within this discourse is more adult-centred than child-centred. This focus on winning can lead to children who are perceived to be less 'able' getting less game time than other more skilled and 'effective' players.

The Fun Discourse

A third way in which sport was spoken of by the participants was of sport as fun. It is interesting to note that when the focus group participants referred to 'sport as fun' it was always in the context of what the children wanted, as opposed to what coaches or parents wanted.

Netball: The kids just want to play netball, and want to have some fun. Just let them have a bit of fun.

Rugby: If you got twenty kids together, chuck them a ball and said go and make up a game, they will end up making a game that's somehow manipulated to their benefit. They'll play a game and all have fun.

Coaches influenced by this discourse create a version of sport which is child-centred and is primarily a source of enjoyment for the child. What is also apparent here is that there is a belief that if the children were given the power to determine and shape the rules of their game, the version of sport that would be constructed could be quite different from the highly regulated version of sport commonly experienced.

When Discourses Collide

The following excerpt illustrates the clash between the organisations' developmental approach, and coaches who want to win:

Rugby: ...we call it the Jonah Lomu syndrome whereby in junior rugby you can win every game if you have a big kid, a fast kid and a kid that can pass and kick. Basically, you tell the kid that can pass, pass to the fast kid and tell the fast kid to run around everyone. You tell the big kid that as soon as he gets the ball to run straight through. What that does over a long period of time it teaches the big kid to hold the ball and run straight, the fast kid to run around everyone, and the small kid to pass every time. As they grow up and everyone matures and develops they don't have any skills to play the game at a higher level and so they drop out. So our thing is trying to keep as many people involved in our sport, or any sport, as long as possible.

[....] I mean the outcome is really irrelevant; it's about the development of the players.

Although the initial aim of the focus group meeting was on parental influences, what quickly emerged was concern over the behaviour of the volunteer parent-coach. The New Zealand Rugby Union, from an administrative perspective, has clear guidelines for clubs and coaches on adopting a developmental approach to children's rugby. However, the participants observed that coaches often develop practices that are driven by a focus on winning. If the coach simply wanted to win every game they got the 'stronger' players in their team to do what they already innately did best, whether that was running straight because they were bigger, or running around because they were faster. The Rugby Union in New Zealand have identified that this short term focus on winning each and every game is at the cost of long term skill and player development.

Working with over-competitive clubs and coaches caused frustration for administrators:

Rugby: When I go to junior coach and managers' meetings, the biggest thing I get is "PC [politically correct] bullshit!" It's the thing they throw at me all the

time, but for us it creates long term effects. By being overly competitive it means that more people are going to be put off the sport long term.

The feeling that sport is purely about winning can be deeply entrenched. Anything that is seen to challenge this is deemed to be ‘soft’ or written off and labelled as politically correct. There is a clash predominantly between a developmental approach and competition. It is interesting that the concept of fun is almost marginalised, although it is consistently referred to by the participants as what the children would want.

Netball: Kids just want to have fun.

Soccer: Not all kids though. No, a lot of kids are competitive and they want to go hard.

It does not seem possible for sport to be about competition, development and fun at the same time. Each sport, each club, and each coach for each team can operate differently and be influenced to a lesser and greater extent by attitudes towards winning. In addition, a child, season by season, may have widely contradictory experiences depending on the philosophy of their coach. Although the sporting organisations facilitate and organise the sport, parents and volunteer parent-coaches hold considerable power in shaping the children’s experience of the game itself. While an organisation can advocate a developmental approach where the focus is not solely on winning, the competitive discourse is perceived by administrators to be the dominant one being played out by coaches and parents on the court, field, or sidelines.

In rugby union, in the area that this research was conducted, “non-competitive” rugby has been introduced for the younger age groups (5 to 11 years of age). No league

tables are maintained and no points are awarded for a win, draw or loss. Another rugby initiative is trying to keep games level so games are not too one-sided. If a score exceeds a differential of 35 points at half time the coaches are encouraged to come together and come up with strategies to even out the game.

Rugby: We monitor the scores, and if it's a 110-nil we'll go hang on a minute, what's going on in this team? But we've had situations where a kid will make a break, and the coach will go "no, no, no" so the kid will put the ball down in the middle of the field and wait for the opposition to come and get it, so they don't get past that 35 point threshold, so they can absolutely thrash them in the second half!

Soccer: But teaching parents, educating parents, to understand that the kids aren't learning anything when it is a thrashing is a real challenge isn't it?

Irrespective of the structures put in place, coaches manipulate the rules to their own ends.

Discourse and Power

There are a diverse range of groups and individuals attempting to influence children's sport. These include national government, regional sport organisations, national and regional governing bodies for individual sports, clubs, schools, coaches, parents and children themselves. What emerges from the analysis of the data is that parent-coaches hold considerable power in determining the nature of a child's sporting experience. The profile of a volunteer coach would appear to be fairly consistent across all the team sports represented. Coaches often were identified as being parents of children who are held to be more skilled and talented than their peers at their chosen sport.

Soccer: When I took over, every convenor for each (age) grade had a kid in the top team in that grade, their kids are high performers and they [the parents]

generally end up running the grade. The big challenge is getting the parents of the developing kids involved.

Theoretically, one would imagine that sports administrators hold considerable power. They are responsible for implementing their national and regional sports organisation policies, they implement the structure of the competitions children play in, and they deal with complaints about inappropriate behaviours. However, a sense of helplessness and an inability to influence coach behaviour emerged from some administrators:

Netball: [...] what happens is that [the children] have good coaches and then next year they don't and then parents become really frustrated because these are the things they've done last time, or last year or been done in the past and then you see your kids lose interest in a sport because all of a sudden they don't have that same coach which is a shame.

This feeling of helplessness and inability to enforce consistency and rules emerged for all administrators when they talked about dealing with coaches. Children's sport relies heavily on the goodwill of volunteers to keep going (Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2010b). As volunteers are giving up their free time, they are not really accountable to anybody; especially it would appear, to the organisations they are volunteering for.

However, a child should not be viewed as always powerless. Children in fact, as they get older have the potential to exercise their power by refusing to play or withdrawing from playing sport. A key focus for the administrators was on encouraging children to remain involved in their sport long term. Increasingly in New Zealand, it

appears that as children move into their teenage years they are exercising their power by opting out of structured sport activities controlled by adults (Thomson, 2000).

Reflections on the Implications for Children's Sport

In their guidelines for children's sport, the majority of sports are heavily influenced by the developmental discourse. However, in the words of administrators who are closely involved in creating the structure in which children's sport takes place, contradictions emerge revealing the conflict between development, competition, and fun. These administrators are at the 'coal-face' of children's sport, and as a consequence are confronted with the excesses of parental behaviour. The child also, is vulnerable to the tensions that play themselves out. Although the policy documents of sports organisations reflect a developmental approach, the structures that are put in place for many sports, including grades, leagues, and representative competitions, are influenced by a focus on competition. It would seem logical that the behaviour of parents or coaches that administrators are concerned about simply reflects the structures that are put in place. Competitive structures will lead to competitive and at times, *excessively* competitive behaviour. Even when developmental structures are put in place, such as 'non-competition rugby', coaches and parents who are more heavily influenced by a win-at-all-costs attitude, can undermine the intended outcomes.

SECTION 6: Parental Observational Instrument at Sporting Events

Introduction

This section presents the results from prospectively collected verbal behaviours, using a systematic observation instrument, of coaches of children (aged 6 – 11 years) at games/matches for four sports codes conducted in the Greater Auckland area.

The original focus of this study was on parental behaviour at children's team sporting events in New Zealand. However, the initial focus group conducted with the sport administrators revealed a greater concern with the behaviour of sports coaches than with the touchline behaviours of parents. As a consequence, the design of the use of POISE was adapted to focus on observations of coaches rather than parents. As there was no evidence of any previous recorded observations of coaching behaviours in children's sport in New Zealand, this shift of focus allowed for an opportunity to set a benchmark for the nature and prevalence of such behaviours.

Methods

This phase of the study adopted a cross-sectional observational study of children's team sport coaches stratified across four team sports: netball, rugby union, soccer, and touch rugby in the 2008-2009 seasons. The target population for this study were coaches of children's (ages 6 to 11 years) team sports from two districts in the Greater Auckland area.

Participants

The aim was to observe eighty different coaches of children's team sports, 20 per sport, selected from published fixture lists.

Observation Instrument

The systematic observation instrument employed was initially designed to record adult spectator behaviour at children's sports games (Graham et al., 1982; Walley et al., 1982). The instrument was subsequently adopted by Randall and McKenzie (1987) to record adult spectator behaviour at youth soccer games. Kidman et al. (1999) adapted this earlier instrument and developed the POISE to record and analyse the nature of parents' comments at children's sport competitions. The POISE, as designed by Kidman et al., was subsequently used to observe parental behaviour in children's sport in the US by Blom and Drane (2008).

The POISE is used to record the following information:

- all comments made by the coaches under observation;
- the target of the coach's comment (e.g. player, referee, team etc.);
- the event (e.g. ball in play, penalty, goal etc.) that is occurring as the comment is made;
- the outcome of the game (win, loss or draw);
- coach gender;
- duration of game in minutes.

The nature of the comments are categorised as *Positive*, *Negative*, or *Neutral*.

The nature of recorded comments are broken down into sub-categories as follows:

Positive

- *Reinforcing*: A supportive comment such as "well done".
- *Hustle*: A motivating comment such as "go, go, go".

Negative

- *Correcting*: A comment made which establishes that a specific action was not satisfactory and should be altered, such as “you need to shoot earlier”. The comment is made in an unsupportive manner with no supporting positive comment such as “bad luck” or “good effort” before providing the corrective feedback (as has been recommended by Smoll and Smith (2006)).
- *Scolding*: Where a player is criticised.
- *Witticism*: A comment often involving sarcasm or ridicule, such as “Oh great shot” when the shot has been anything but.
- *Contradicting*: A comment that may vary from positive to negative, and may be confusing for a player, e.g. “Tackle, that’s it, no you committed yourself too early”.

Neutral

- *Instructional*: telling the player what to do e.g. “Play it forward”.
- *Direct Question*: e.g. “Do you want to come off?”
- *Indirect Question*: A question aimed at a player but not relating to this event e.g. “Who will be at training next week?”
- *Rhetorical Question*: A question requiring no answer e.g. “Where’s the passing today?”
- *Social*: any comment not related to the event e.g. “Let’s get a coffee after”.
- *Other*: any comment that does not fit into any other category.

In the previous New Zealand study using POISE (Kidman et al., 1999), and in the study by Blom and Drane (2008), instructional comments were classified as negative, as from an athlete-centred coaching perspective telling children what to do takes away from the athlete's decision-making process (Kidman et al., 1999; Martens, 2004). Kidman et al. argued that when a child is simply told what to do learning is inhibited. For this phase of the study the instrument has been adapted and instructional comments are categorised as neutral. The rationale for adapting the instrument draws upon ideas put forward by Randall and McKenzie (1987), who noted that negative behaviour can be viewed from two perspectives. The first perspective relates to the harmful psychological effects of aggressive adult behaviour on children. The second perspective is related to behaviour that can adversely affect the learning environment for children. While acknowledging that constant instruction can adversely impact on athlete learning (the implications of which are discussed in Section 10 of this report), the focus of this current study was on the more aggressive verbal behaviours and their potential for harm. When recording coach comments using POISE, the tone adopted by the coach was also taken into consideration. For example, a simple instruction to "play it forward" would be recorded as instructional. A coach dissatisfied or frustrated with the performance of a player and subsequently yelling "PLAY IT FORWARD" would be recorded as scolding and negative.

Procedure

After gaining full permission from the sports bodies responsible for the administration of the four team sports for their games to be observed in this study, details of their fixture lists for children's (ages 6 to 11 years) games for the coming season were requested and provided. Dates and venues were identified for recording and matches were pre-selected for observation from the fixture lists to ensure a spread of

age representation. The observer at the game then selected a coach for observation during the team talk stage immediately prior to the game.

Data Analysis

Comments were recorded and converted into codes and tabulated representing the nature of the comment, the target of the comment, and the event. Fisher's exact and chi-square (χ^2) tests were used to compare distributions of categorical variables across the four sports. Poisson regressions were used to estimate and compare rates of comments per minute between sports treating game length, which varied between sports, as an exposure variable. The effects of child's age, gender of the coach, game result and the team sport played on the rate of comments per minute were also investigated using Poisson regression. All analyses were performed using Stata version 10.0 (StataCorp, College Station, TX, USA) and a level of 5% was used to define statistical significance.

Results

In total, 72 matches and coaches were observed including 19 netball coaches (18 female, 1 male), 18 rugby union coaches (all male), 17 soccer coaches (4 female, 13 male), and 18 touch rugby coaches (8 female, 10 male). The study design intention to observe a total of 80 matches was not ultimately possible within the time constraints of this phase of the study due to a range of factors including adverse weather conditions, researcher illness, and game cancellations.

The Prevalence of Coaches' Comments

Overall, 10,697 coach comments were observed and recorded. The number of comments recorded for rugby union coaches (4,033) was greater than for any of the other sports observed, although the length of game time observed was also greater for rugby (Table 1). The rate of coach comments per minute, by sport is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: *Number of Games Observed, Total Comments Recorded, Total Number of Minutes Observed and Rate of Comments per Minute*

Sport	Games	Comments	Minutes	Rate (95% CI) ^a
Netball	19	2,656	760	3.49 (3.36 - 3.63)
Rugby	18	4,033	920	4.38 (4.25 - 4.52)
Soccer	17	2,169	660	3.29 (3.15 - 3.43)
Touch	18	1,839	540	3.41 (3.25 - 3.56)
Total	72	10,697	2,880	3.71 (3.64 - 3.79)

^a Rate is number of comments per minute

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the nature of comments made by coaches. The most common type of comment fell into the neutral category, and predominantly comprised of instructional comments ($n = 4,437$, 96.4%). Positive comments accounted for 35.4% of total comments made and negative comments for 21.6% of the overall total.

Table 2: *Number and Percentage of Categories of Coaches' Comments*

Nature	Verbal Behaviour	Number of Comments	Total Comments	
			n	(%)
Positive			3,785	(35.4)
	Reinforcing	1,984		
	Hustle	1,801		
Negative			2,310	(21.6)
	Correcting	744		
	Scolding	1,520		
	Witticism	37		
	Contradicting	9		
Neutral			4,602	(43.0)
	Instruction	4,437		
	Direct Question	88		
	Indirect Question	0		
	Rhetorical Question	6		
	Social	2		
	Other	69		
Total			10,697	

A further breakdown of the comments by sport revealed significant differences in the pattern of comments between sports ($p < 0.01$). Rugby union coaches recorded the lowest percentage of positive comments (26.5%) and the highest percentage of negative (23.0%) and neutral comments (50.5%), whereas soccer recorded the highest percentage of positive (46.8%) and the lowest percentage of negative comments (19.8%), (Table 3).

Table 3: *Number and Percentage of Coaches' Comments by Sport*

Sport	Positive Comments		Negative Comments		Neutral Comments		Total
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	
Netball	1,037	(39.0)	540	(20.3)	1,079	(40.6)	2,656
Rugby	1,069	(26.5)	926	(23.0)	2,038	(50.5)	4,033
Soccer	1,016	(46.8)	429	(19.8)	724	(33.4)	2,169
Touch	663	(36.1)	415	(22.6)	761	(41.4)	1,839
Total	3,785	(35.4)	2,310	(21.6)	4,602	(43.0)	10,697

Testing the Effects of Sport, Athlete Age, Coach Gender and Game Result on Positive Comments

Poisson regression analysis found no significant difference in positive comments by sports ($p = 0.06$), by age of child athlete ($p = 0.14$), or by coach gender ($p = 0.82$). However, a significant difference in positive comments by game result (win, lose, or draw) was observed. Using 'winning' as the reference category, incidence rate ratios of positive comments were 0.85 (95% CI: 0.68, 1.06) when the team lost and 1.30 (95% CI: 0.95, 1.79) when the team drew. This implies that when the team was losing, the rate of positive comments made by the coach on average dropped by 15% compared to a team that was winning. The rate of positive comments increased in extremely close games (when a team drew).

Testing the Effects of Sport, Athlete Age, Coach Gender and Game Result on Negative Comments

Poisson regression analysis found a significant difference in the effects of the sport played on negative comments ($p < 0.01$). Using 'netball' as the reference category,

incidence rate ratio of negative comments were 1.70 (95% CI: 1.20, 2.39) for rugby union, 0.90 (95% CI: 0.60, 1.35) for soccer, and 0.88 (95% CI: 0.62, 1.25) for touch rugby. This implies that the rate of negative comments made by rugby union coaches were, on average, significantly higher than the other sports (70% higher than netball).

No significant difference was found in negative comments by athlete age ($p = 0.08$) or game result ($p = 0.39$), although, a significant difference ($p = 0.02$) in negative comments by coach gender was identified. Females had an incidence rate ratio of 0.71 (95% CI: 0.53, 0.95) to that of males. This implies that the rate of negative comments made by female coaches was 29% lower than negative comments made by male coaches. When both the sport and the coach gender were simultaneously included in a Poisson regression model the difference in negative comments between sports remained statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) but the gender of the coach was no longer significant ($p = 0.50$).

The Target of Coaches' Comments

The frequency and distribution of the target of coaches' negative comments for each of the four sports is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: *Target of Coaches' Negative Comments by Sport*

Target	Netball		Rugby		Soccer		Touch		Totals
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	
Team	312	(57.8)	482	(52.1)	262	(61.1)	307	(74.0)	1363
Player	218	(40.4)	372	(40.2)	158	(36.8)	71	(17.1)	819
Umpire	7	(1.3)	51	(5.5)	9	(2.1)	36	(8.7)	103
Official	0	(0)	17	(1.8)	0	(0)	0	(0)	17
Opposition	0	(0)	4	(0.4)	0	(0)	0	(0)	4
Other	3	(0.5)	0	(0)	0	(0)	1	(0.2)	4
Total	540		926		429		415		2,310

A further breakdown of the targets of negative comments also revealed variations across the four sports (Table 5). An analysis of the differences between sports in the rate of negative comments that targeted match officials revealed a significant difference ($p = 0.001$). Officials' decisions were challenged or criticised by coaches in 12 out of 18 of the games of rugby union observed, and 11 out of 18 of the games of touch rugby observed.

Further analysis of negative and positive comments targeting individual players showed that in the majority of games observed (60%), **at least** one individual player was on the receiving end of **only** negative comments.

Table 5: *Number of Games in which Umpires/Officials or Individual Children were the Target of Negative Comments*

Sport	Games Observed	Umpires / Officials ^a		(95% CI)	Individual Players ^b		(95% CI)
		n	(%)		n	(%)	
Netball	19	4	(21)	(6 - 46)	15	(79)	(54 - 94)
Rugby	18	12	(67)	(4 - 87)	12	(67)	(41 - 87)
Soccer	17	2	(12)	(0.01 - 36)	9	(53)	(28 - 77)
Touch	18	11	(61)	(36 - 83)	7	(39)	(17 - 64)
Total	72	29	(40)	(29 - 53)	43	(60)	(47 - 71)

^a Number of games where officials were the target of negative comments

^b Number of games where at least one individual player received negative comments only

Discussion

Over one in every five comments made by coaches in all sports was negative. This ratio of negative comments has been shown to be unlikely to be conducive to or promote a positive environment for children (Randall, 1992). Indeed, punitive behaviours exhibited by coaches are more likely to induce feelings of resentment from athletes as opposed to improving performance, and have been identified as factors contributing to children withdrawing from sport (Smoll & Smith, 2006). In our comparison of sports, rugby union coaches recorded the lowest percentage of positive comments (26.5%) and the highest percentage of negative comments (23.0%).

Coaches across all sports made significantly less positive comments if their team was losing. Although winning has not been identified as being of over-riding importance to children, there is evidence to suggest that children realise that winning is important to adults (Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997; Smoll & Smith, 2006). The

decrease in positive comments identified when a team is losing would support the findings of Smoll and Smith and would indicate to the players that winning equals praise.

In relation to the negative comments made, a significant difference was identified in the rate of negative comments made by gender (male coaches made more negative comments than female coaches) and by sport played (rugby union coaches made more negative comments than coaches from the other team sports). However, coach gender and sport played is related. When investigated together, analysis revealed that it was the sports played rather than the coach's gender which was significantly associated with the rates of comments made. This suggests that it is the culture within the sport which drives the rates of coaches' comments.

The target of coaches' comments also revealed interesting variations across the four sports. In the games observed, negative comments aimed at the referee/umpire more commonly occurred in rugby union and in touch rugby. Some typical comments recorded were "Open your eyes ref" (rugby union) and "Come on ref we're not playing rugby here" (soccer). In three of the rugby union games observed, the referee had to speak to the coach to ask them to curb their comments. In one of the rugby union games an argument ensued between the coach and the referee which resulted in the coach walking his team off the field before the end of the game (this was in a junior 7-year old game). These findings support concerns expressed in a study commissioned by the English Football Association (FA) where a survey of stakeholders involved in children's sport found that 40% of respondents were concerned about swearing and abuse aimed at referees and coaches (Brackenridge et al., 2004). The delivery of children's sport relies heavily upon volunteer officials and Brackenridge et al. reported that the English FA were up to 50% short of referees and officials with the main reason

cited for this shortfall being the abuse that referees were being subjected to from the sideline.

In ALL of the 72 games observed, at least one child was scolded for not following instructions correctly or for making a mistake. As seen in Table 5, the only comments that certain individual child players had directed at them in many games were negative in nature. This was the case even in a number of games where coaches' comments were predominantly extremely positive and supportive. Remembering that these are young children who are still developing skills and learning their games in what is supposedly a fun environment, these findings give cause for concern.

Limitations

Although the findings of this phase of the study provide new insights into the nature and prevalence of coach behaviours at children's sporting events in New Zealand, the study location was restricted to two districts of the Greater Auckland area. As such, this limits the claims that can be made relating to the generalisability of these findings. However, in building on previous research by Kidman et al. (1999) that was conducted in the Dunedin area of New Zealand, these findings suggest that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the nature of parental and coaching behaviours at children's sporting events in New Zealand give cause for concern.

SECTION 7: Parents and Children

Introduction

This section discusses the findings of a survey that was administered to parents and their children. There were three immediate aims of this component of the study: first, to get a preliminary idea of children's sense of enjoyment of the team sports they participate in; second, to gain an insight into parents' perceptions of the positive and negative experiences associated with their children's sport; and third, to identify children interested in participating in a follow-up study (see Section 8). The names used in this chapter are all pseudonyms used to protect the anonymity of participants.

Methods

This phase of the study was a two stage cross-sectional descriptive study that utilised a two-part questionnaire (see Appendix A). The first part of the questionnaire was completed by children, the second part by parents. The questionnaire design contained both closed and open-ended questions, and drew upon both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques. The target population for this study were children in school years 2 to 6 who were predominantly aged 6 to 11 years, and one of their parents. The setting was in two districts in the Greater Auckland area.

Participants

Primary schools.

The first stage was to invite primary schools to participate in the study. Schools were stratified into tertiles (high, mid, and low) based on decile and urban/rural settings. The high tertile comprised of schools in deciles 8, 9, and 10; the mid-tertile deciles 4 to 7; and the low tertile deciles 1 to 3. The design incorporated the selection of six schools,

and was stratified so that one school would be selected from each tertile grouping and urban/rural setting. The stratification design reflected an attempt to gather a heterogeneous range of parents' and children's views to increase the generalisability of the findings.

Children and their parents.

The second stage was to sample all eligible children (and one of their parents) within the selected schools. The inclusion criterion for participation was attendance in school years 2 to 6. These school years predominantly comprise children aged 6 to 10 years.

Data Analysis

Data were recorded onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Initial analysis was descriptive, both for the quantitative and qualitative data. For the quantitative analysis, Fisher's exact test was used to determine associations between categorical variables as this test appropriately deals with the small cell sample numbers seen in some cross-tabulations. All quantitative analyses were performed using Stata version 10.0 (StataCorp, College Station, TX, USA) and a level of 5% was used to define statistical significance.

In terms of the qualitative component, the open-ended questions were designed to be kept simple and prompt relatively brief answers of a descriptive nature. Consequently, an interpretive approach was not adopted for the qualitative analysis, and the analysis of this data was basic thematic analysis.

Results

Survey Response Rates by School

Four schools participated in this phase of the study. A number of schools did not respond to either the initial invitation or the subsequent follow-ups. Two schools (both low-decile urban) did not wish to participate. As these are the only two low-decile urban schools in the study catchment area, and because of the time constraints imposed by this study, it was decided to continue using only the four consenting schools. The design intention to distribute 2,500 questionnaires through six schools was thus impossible; the implications of which are discussed in the limitations section at the end of this section.

A total of 1,204 questionnaires were distributed to all children in years 2 to 6 in the participating schools (refer Table 6), and a total of 358 completed questionnaires were returned (183 girls and 175 boys), yielding an overall response rate of 29.7%.

Table 6: *Participating Schools and Response Rates*

Decile	Location	Questionnaires sent out	Response rate	
		n	n	(%)
High	Rural	499	161	(32.3)
High	Urban	230	62	(27.0)
Mid	Urban	255	99	(38.8)
Mid	Rural	220	36	(16.4)
Total		1,204	358	(29.7)

Part 1: Children's Responses

The respondents.

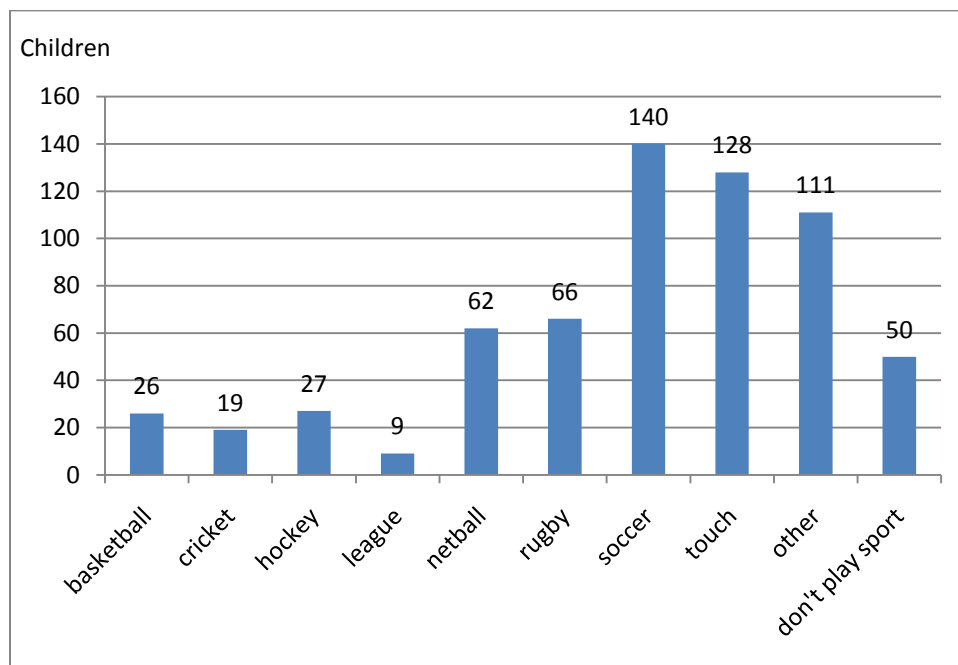
Respondents were approximately evenly split between boys (175) and girls (183). Table 7 provides a breakdown of the respondents by age and gender.

Table 7: Respondents by Age and Gender

Age	Male		Female		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
5	3	(0.8)	1	(0.3)	4	(1.1)
6	20	(5.6)	15	(4.2)	35	(9.8)
7	41	(11.5)	34	(9.5)	75	(20.9)
8	28	(7.8)	36	(10.1)	64	(17.9)
9	36	(10.1)	39	(10.9)	75	(20.9)
10	36	(10.1)	43	(12.0)	79	(22.1)
11	11	(3.1)	15	(4.2)	26	(7.3)
Total	175	(48.9)	183	(51.1)	358	(100)

Team sports played.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the team sports that these children played (respondents were able to indicate more than one sport).

**Figure 1: Sports Children Play**

The number of sports children play.

A number of children played more than one organised team sport. Of the 358 respondents, 133 (37.1%) children only played one team sport, 101 (28.2%) children played two sports, 48 (13.4%) children played three sports, 26 (7.3%) children played four or more sports, and 50 (14.0%) children played no team sports whatsoever.

Level of enjoyment.

From Table 8 it can be seen that the vast majority of the children (86.3%, $n=297$) either enjoyed or really enjoyed playing team sports. There was a significant difference (Fisher's exact test, $p<0.001$) between the levels of enjoyment reported by children who currently played sport, and those children who did not currently play a team sport.

Table 8: *Respondents' Level of Enjoyment of their Team Sports*

Played sport	A lot		Quite a lot		It's ok		Don't like it much		Don't like it at all		Total
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Yes	220	(72.1)	61	(20.0)	22	(7.2)	1	(0.3)	1	(0.3)	305
No	7	(17.9)	9	(23.1)	15	(38.5)	3	(7.7)	5	(12.8)	39
Total	227	(66.0%)	70	(20.3)	37	(10.8)	4	(1.2)	6	(1.7)	344

Involvement with sport.

Of the 320 respondents to this question, 268 (83.7%) played their sport(s) either every week or most weeks; 35 (10.9%) played sometimes; and 20 (6.2%) did not play very often.

Part 2: Parent/Caregiver Responses

The respondents.

The majority of the 358 respondents were female (311, 86.9%). Male respondents numbered only 44 (12.3%), both mother and father completed one questionnaire, and the gender identity of two of the respondents was not clear (denoted by ‘parent’ only).

Parents’ perceived importance of team sports to their child.

The vast majority of the 354 respondents who answered this question felt that participating in team sports was important for their child: 341 (96.3%) respondents felt it was important; 7 (2.0%) felt it wasn’t important; and 5 (1.4%) weren’t sure.

Parental involvement with their child’s sport.

Table 9 outlines how regularly parents attended their child’s matches and training sessions.

Table 9: *Respondents’ Level of Engagement with their Child’s Sport*

Attended	Always		Most Times		Sometimes		Rarely		Total	
	N	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Training	122	(38.5)	100	(31.5)	52	(16.4)	43	(13.6)	317	(100)
Matches	203	(64.2)	79	(25.0)	20	(6.3)	14	(4.4)	316	(100)

Parental involvement related to child’s enjoyment of sport.

Table 10 provides a breakdown of parents’ attendance at training, attendance at matches, and their children’s perceived level of enjoyment with their sport. No significant relationship was found between parents’ frequency of attendance at their child’s training sessions and their child’s enjoyment of sport (Fisher’s exact test, $p=0.467$). However, analysis revealed a significant relationship between frequency of

parents attendance at their child's matches, and the child's reported level of enjoyment of sport (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.001$).

Table 10: *Relationship between Parent's Attendance at Training and Matches, and Child's Enjoyment of Sport*

	Child enjoyed sport a lot		Quite a lot		It's ok		Didn't like it much		Didn't like it at all		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	N	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
<i>Parent Attended Training</i>												
Always	85	(71.4)	23	(19.3)	9	(7.6)	0	(0)	2	(1.7)	119	(100)
Most times	69	(69.0)	22	(22.0)	9	(9.0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	100	(100)
Sometimes	40	(76.9)	9	(17.3)	3	(5.8)	0	(0)	0	(0)	52	(100)
Rarely	27	(62.8)	9	(20.9)	4	(9.3)	2	(4.7)	1	(2.3)	43	(100)
<i>Parent Attended Matches</i>												
Always	149	(74.1)	39	(19.4)	12	(6.0)	0	(0)	1	(0.5)	201	(100)
Most times	58	(73.4)	14	(17.7)	6	(7.6)	0	(0)	1	(1.3)	79	(100)
Sometimes	10	(50.0)	5	(25.0)	5	(25.0)	0	(0)	0	(0)	20	(100)
Rarely	6	(42.9)	3	(21.4)	2	(14.3)	2	(14.3)	1	(7.1)	14	(100)

Parents' positive experiences associated with their children's sport.

Of the 358 respondents, 308 (86.0%) identified positive experiences they have had with their child's organised sport. Analysis of these parents' open-ended responses to this question revealed the following key themes relating to positive experiences:

- seeing their child playing in a team and learning about the importance of teamwork (37.7%, n=116 of these parents referred to this),
- the social aspect: meeting new friends (parents and children) (34.1%, n=105),
- seeing their child enjoy themselves and have fun (27.3%, n=84),
- their child learning new skills (20.8%, n=64),
- winning and being successful (20.1%, n=62),
- witnessing increased confidence and self-esteem in their child (18.8%, n=58),
- improved health or physical fitness (14.0%, n=43),
- the development of broader social skills (12.3%, n=38),
- time spent at sport is quality family time (10.1%, n=31),
- good sportsmanship – learning how to win and how to lose (6.5%, n=20), and
- getting involved in coaching/management (5.8%, n=18).

Parents' negative experiences associated with their child's sport.

Of the 358 respondents, 195 (54.5%) identified negative experiences that they as parents have had with their child's sport. The major themes that emerged for these parents were:

- over-competitive or inappropriate parent behaviour (36.9%, n=72 of these parents referred to this),
- over-competitive or inappropriate coaching (27.7%, n=54),
- poor organisation (20.0%, n=39),
- bad sportsmanship from other children (13.8%, n=27),

- time constraints and financial cost associated with participation in organised team sport; (10.2%, n=20), and
- unreliability of other parents (8.2%, n=16).

Further analysis of the reports of inappropriate or over-competitive behaviour by both parents (n=72) and coaches (n=54) revealed 62 reports that related specifically to verbal abuse. Table 11 provides a breakdown of the target of the verbal abuse reported.

Table 11: *Targets of Verbal Abuse by Parents and Coaches*

Target of Verbal Abuse	Reported Incidents	
	n	(%)
Children	48	(77.4)
Referees	10	(16.1)
Other parents/coaches	4	(6.4)
Total	62	(100)

Parents' negative experiences, by child age.

Table 12 is an overview of the total number of negative parental experiences by child age. Analysis revealed a significant association between age of child, and parents reporting of negative experiences (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.026$). As seen in Table 12 there appeared to be an increasing trend in parental reports of negative experiences from 5-6 year olds to 8 year olds, a flattening from 8 to 10-year olds, and a further increase for 11-year olds.

Table 12: *Parents' Reports of Negative Experiences, by Child Age*

Age of Child	Respondents		Had negative experiences with their child's sport	
	n	(%)	n	(%) ^a
5-6	39	(10.9)	12	(30.8)
7	75	(20.9)	37	(49.3)
8	64	(17.9)	38	(59.4)
9	75	(20.9)	44	(58.7)
10	79	(22.1)	47	(59.5)
11	26	(7.3)	17	(65.4)
Total	358	(100)		

^a Expressed as a percentage of the total number of parents of children in this age bracket who had identified negative experiences.

Parents' negative experiences, by child gender.

No significant difference was identified in the percentage of parents of boys, and the parents of girls, who detailed negative experiences associated with their child's sport (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.112$).

Other parents' negative impact on a child's enjoyment of sport.

Parents were asked if other parents had ever negatively affected their child's (as opposed to their) enjoyment of sport. Of the 358 respondents, 339 (94.7%) responded to this question. Seventy one of the respondents to this question (20.9%) believed that other parents' behaviour had negatively impacted upon their child's enjoyment of sport at some time. The responses either specifically related to perceived inappropriate parental behaviour (70.4%, $n=50$), and/or perceived inappropriate coaching behaviour (40.8%, $n=29$). A breakdown of the parental reports of inappropriate behaviour by both parents ($n=50$) and coaches ($n=29$) revealed 39 reports that related specifically to verbal abuse that had been aimed at their child. Four parents reported incidents of verbal

altercations between parents and/or coaches that had visibly upset their child, and two parents described incidents where referees had been verbally abused.

Further analysis examined whether there was any association between child age and perceived negative impact; and whether there was any association between child gender and perceived negative impact. Analysis revealed a significant association between child age and parental reports of other parent behaviours that had negatively impacted on their child's enjoyment of sport (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.016$). The number of reports was highest at ages 9 and 10 years. No significant relationship (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.791$) was identified in relation to child gender and parents' reporting of negative behaviours that had adversely impacted upon their child's enjoyment of sport.

Further study.

A total of 213 (59.5%) respondents expressed an interest in their child being involved in a follow-up focus group interview.

Discussion

These findings draw upon a sample of children representing a reasonably even distribution of ages and gender. The four team sports that were the focus of this study (soccer, touch rugby, netball, and rugby union) were the most highly represented team sports. As such, these children and their parents were well situated to comment on experiences relating to these four team sports.

Previous research has identified that forcing children to engage in exercise or sports has been inversely related to physical activity in adulthood (Taylor, Blair, Cummings, Wun, & Malina, 1999). Of the children who played sport, the majority of them (72%, $n=220$) really enjoyed their sport, with only 0.3% ($n=1$) stating that they didn't like sport at all. Of the children who did not play sport, only 17.9% ($n=7$) stated

that they really enjoyed team sports. These findings suggest that the majority of these children were not being forced to engage in something they did not enjoy.

Of the parents who responded, it appears that they invested considerable time and energy in supporting their children's participation in organised team sports. Nearly all parent respondents (96.3%, n=341) felt that it was important their child played team sports for a variety of reasons and many respondents identified a range of positive aspects.

For parents, the dominant themes that emerged relating to the positive aspects of sport were their child playing in a team, meeting new friends, and having fun. These findings support previous research that has highlighted parents' perceptions of positive effects for children participating in organised team sports (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003). These include enjoyment, the development of social skills such as working in a team, motor skill development, overall health benefits, and increased self-esteem and confidence.

A number of studies have highlighted that children enjoy participating in sport more when there is less emphasis on competition and winning (Allender, Cowburn, & Fraser, 2006) and it was interesting to note that more parents (27.3%, n=84) identified with the idea that sport was primarily a source of fun for their child, than those parents who identified with winning (20.1%, n=62).

Parental support has been identified as playing a significant role in creating a positive and enjoyable sporting environment for a child (Hoyle & Leff, 1997). Although no significant relationship was found between parental attendance at training and a child's enjoyment of sport, a significant relationship between parental attendance at matches and a child's enjoyment of sport was identified. Of the 282 parents who stated that they always attended their child's matches, 73.4% (n=207) of these children

enjoyed their sport 'a lot'. In contrast, of the 34 parents who rarely or only sometimes attended their child's matches, only 47% (n=16) enjoyed their sport 'a lot'. (See Table 10).

Parents identified more positive than negative experiences with their child's sport, with 86% (n=308) of parents detailing positive experiences, and 54.5% (n=195) detailing negative experiences. Although no significant association was identified between parental reports of negative experiences and child gender, these reports of negative experiences increased by child age. A further significant association was also found between parental reports of negative behaviours that had specifically impacted upon their child's enjoyment of sport, and child age. These reports increased until ages 9 and 10 years, but dropped at age 11. There were relatively small 11-year old numbers compared to other age groups and there is a possibility that this lower level could be attributable to a sampling error. There are two possible explanations to the significant identifiable increase in negative reports with child age. The increase may simply be related to the case that the longer a child plays sport the more likelihood there is of negative experiences to be observed. However, as found by Omli and LaVoi (2009), it is apparent that as children get older, sport becomes more competitive and that this increase may actually reflect age-specific prevalence of negative behaviours. Although of interest, caution should be applied to the interpretation of the association between child age and negative reports seen here.

Some of the specific parent reports that related to negative aspects of coaching and parental behaviours give cause for concern. This concern is pertinent as the type of negative behaviour evidenced here has been cited as a major determinant of children dropping out of competitive sport (Butcher, Lindner, & Johns, 2002).

The most significant negative aspects that emerged related to inappropriate parent or coach behaviour:

Maggie: Pushy parents over-disciplining kids. Parents criticising coaches and/or refs. Coaches favouring more skilled kids.

Maggie's account revealed a concern with a range of parenting and coaching practices that was shared by a number of respondents (35.8% of respondents were concerned with parent behaviour, 27.2% with coach behaviour). Although the answers elicited in this questionnaire were brief and descriptive in nature, and are unlikely to establish reliable prevalence estimates of specific perceived inappropriate behaviours, there is evidence emerging that inappropriate parenting and coaching behaviour does exist, and is not uncommon. This evidence was supported by the accounts of coaching behaviour that respondents perceived had directly impacted upon their own child's enjoyment of sport. For example:

Belinda: His coach yelled and screamed at him when he was 5 years old. Put him off rugby until this year. He is now 10 years old.

Other than the harm that verbal abuse can have on the child who is the recipient of the abuse, Omli and La Voi (2009) also highlighted a concern with what they refer to as background anger. Background anger is defined as confrontations, verbal or non-verbal, between two or more people that does not specifically involve the observer (Cummings, 1987). Cummings noted that exposure to background anger can also be emotionally distressing for a child. Analysis of the reports of negative behaviours that parents had witnessed in this current study, revealed 100 incidents of verbal abuse, aimed at the parent's own child, other children, other parents/coaches, or referees. The

following example from a mother of a 9-year old touch rugby player illustrated that children can be regularly exposed to this type of behaviour.

Jane: PARENTS! Abusive, competitive parents on the sideline. There are many more than I expected. It's very ugly when parents misbehave.

It would appear that it is not only the recipient of verbal or non-verbal displays of anger who can be affected, but that exposure to background anger can be particularly distressing and stressful for any child (Cummings, 1987; Omli & La Voi, 2009). This would be a major concern for those children regularly exposed to incidents of inappropriate parental and coaching behaviour.

Limitations

Low survey response rates are increasingly becoming an area of concern in social research (de Vaus, 2002) and the low response rate was a limitation of this phase of the study. However, it has been noted that the associated impact of differential participation in targeted population studies can be small (Nohr, Frydenberg, Henriksen, & Olsen, 2006). Rothman and Greenland (1998) highlighted the traditional misconception that generalisation from a study sample must depend on that sample being a sub-group representative of the target population. They argued that it is possible for observations to be abstracted, rather than generalised, to a broader domain of experience. Although the response rates were relatively low (29.7%), it is still possible to abstract the findings from this sample to the target population of children and parents involved with children's team sports in New Zealand.

SECTION 8: Can We Have Our Ball Back Please? Children's Perspectives on Organised Team Sports

Introduction

A key aim of this study was to give voice to children's views of sport. This section presents a Foucauldian discourse analysis of children's views relating to their sporting experiences and examines how the group of child participants constructed sport.

Methods

This qualitative phase of the study utilised focus group interviews with children aged 6 to 11 years in two districts of the Greater Auckland area.

Participants

Primary schools.

The first stage was to invite two primary schools to participate. The two schools were to be selected from the four schools who had participated in the previous phase of the study that distributed surveys to children and their parents (see Section 7). The criteria used to select the schools were based on: schools' expression of interest in being involved with a further interview study; and sufficient interest from children and parents from these schools to participate in follow-up focus group interviews. In addition, to increase the chances of capturing more heterogeneity in the sample, the schools selected would ideally be one urban school and one rural school.

Children.

The second stage was to sample 32 eligible children (16 from each school) whose parents had indicated in the survey responses that their child would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview.

Procedure

Of the four schools that participated in the questionnaire phase of this study, two principals in particular were extremely interested in this research. As a consequence, meetings were held with the two principals in September 2008 and it was subsequently agreed to conduct the focus groups in these two schools. One school was located in an urban location (a mid decile school), the other in a rural location (a high decile school).

The second stage was to invite children to participate in the focus group interviews. During the survey phase (refer Section 7), 255 questionnaires had been distributed to children in the urban mid-decile school. Of the 99 completed questionnaires, 57 expressed an interest in being involved in the follow-up focus group interviews. In the larger rural high-decile school, 93 of the 161 respondents expressed an interest in their children being involved.

A process of purposive sampling was conducted to review the 150 completed surveys to identify potential participants who:

- were aged 6 to 11 years;
- regularly participated in more than one organised team sport (touch rugby, soccer, rugby union, or netball);
- had parents who were actively involved in their children's sport;
- had parents who had provided responses to open-ended questions that potentially indicated these children had a story to tell (positive or negative).

Focus groups were divided into two age groups: one aged 6 to 8 years and the other 9 to 11 years. In each school, 10 participants (5 male and 5 female) per age group were invited to participate in the focus group study. A letter was sent to each of the parents, with the relevant participant information, consent and assent forms. The signed consent and assent forms were returned via the classroom teacher to the principal/vice principal.

Conducting the Focus Group Interviews

Table 13 shows the breakdown of the 30 participants interviewed. Some participants missed the second scheduled focus group meeting, due to absence from school on that day.

Table 13: *Participants Interviewed for the Study*

School Type	Age Group	Number of Participants	
		Session 1	Session 2
Urban	6-8 years	8 (4 boys, 4 girls)	8 (4 boys, 4 girls)
	9-11 years	9 (5 boys, 4 girls)	9 (5 boys, 4 girls)
Rural	6-8 years	7 (4 boys, 3 girls)	5 (3 boys, 2 girls)
	9-11 years	6 (3 boys, 3 girls)	6 (3 boys, 3 girls)
Total		30	28

Eight focus group interviews were conducted at the two primary schools in November 2008. Each group was interviewed twice. The focus group interviews were completed on school premises during normal school hours, and were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed by a research assistant.

Each focus group meeting lasted for 35-40 minutes. The rationale used to establish optimum group size, number and duration of group meetings, and safe location was drawn from recommendations by authors of a number of studies related to the conducting of focus group interviewing with children in this age group (6 to 11 years) (Aubrey & Dahl, 2006; Grieg & Taylor, 1999; Haubl & Liebsch, 2009; Hesketh,

Waters, Green, Salmon, & Williams, 2005; Morrow & Richards, 1996; Porcellato, Dughill, & Springett, 2002).

Adopting guidelines by Grieg and Taylor (1999), the purpose of the focus group meeting was explained to the children at the beginning of each meeting. The main themes to be explored in the initial meeting were kept simple. For example, children were asked what they liked about their sport, and then asked what they disliked. These likes and dislikes were explored further in that initial meeting. The themes used to drive the second focus group for each of the groups were drawn from an initial review of the transcripts of the first meetings. In the second focus group, children were specifically asked to identify what they liked and disliked about the coaching and parental behaviours they had observed or experienced.

Analysis

The children's stories were initially analysed for themes that revealed ways that they interpreted how sport was constructed for them. The next stage of analysis involved reading the children's stories to see if and where the dominant discourses identified in the analysis of the administrators' focus group (refer Section 5) became visible through the children's words.

Children's Stories: It Just Makes You Feel Invincible Sometimes

The analysis of the administrators' focus group transcripts identified three dominant discourses which are referred to as a competitive discourse; a developmental discourse; and a fun discourse.

It's All About Winning, isn't it?

Unless prompted, the children interviewed spoke very little about the importance of winning. When asked what they liked about their sport, the concepts of winning or competition were rarely mentioned. In most of the groups the concept of winning had to

be specifically introduced to provoke discussion. The following excerpt comes from a discussion near the end of one of the focus group (age 9 to 11 years) meetings:

SW (interviewer): Do you know what's really interesting? One thing you haven't said about what you like is winning.

Ben: Nothing comes out of winning really, but when you lose a game it actually teaches you a lesson. For example, we were playing against this team that hadn't lost a single game. They were supposed to be really good but they'd become all sloppy thinking that they would win no matter what. That's what comes out of winning, you get over confident and with confidence comes laziness.

SW: So why didn't you say winning? Is winning not important?

Jack: Well winning, it makes you feel good but if you lose you just try better next time. It's not like you're really, really disappointed or anything. Try and do better next time and I only play sport for the fun of it, it's not really competitive or anything for me.

SW: But you like playing at representative level.

Jack: Yeah, but if we don't win or get into the finals it's not like I'm really upset or anything.

While Ben is talking about soccer and Jack is talking about touch rugby, neither of the boys would appear to view sport as being primarily about winning. However, the games they play are in organised leagues, and league tables are maintained. At their age group there are also regional representative teams, where only the best players in each region are selected, and Jack has represented his region in touch rugby. Ben appears to be very aware of this competition structure when he talks about the unbeaten status of his opponents. In spite of this, both Ben and Jack adopt speaking positions which clearly are at odds with those offered by the competitive discourse and Jack firmly positions himself within the fun discourse. Winning would still appear to be a desirable outcome and losing means you need to improve. However, both of these children

seemed to have put winning into perspective, acknowledged its existence, but it is not pre-eminent in the way they talk about sport.

When asked about winning, most of the children acknowledged that they liked the feeling of winning, but throughout all of the group interviews, winning never emerged as the sole sought-after position. The dominant ways they spoke about sport were as fun, an opportunity to be with their friends, and being treated fairly.

A Focus on Athlete Development

In the administrators' focus group, administrators from all four team sports highlighted the importance of sport as a means of nurturing the long-term development of skill. Coaching guidelines developed by the national and regional organisations for all sports involved in this study highlight the focus on enjoyment and skill development for all children participating in their sports. In spite of this, the structure and organisation of children's sport created by some of these organisations is highly regulated, structured and competitive. In eight focus group meetings the influence of the developmental approach on perceived coaching behaviour was barely visible.

The only time children referred to specific skill development was in relation to enjoyment and a visible representation of sport primarily as a source of fun. For example:

Dan (age 9-11 years): I love that in rugby you get to have scrums and you get to do high tackles.

However, the children do recognise that other lessons can be learnt from sport, such as when Ben speaks above about learning from losing. Geoff (age 9 to 11 years) positions himself in the developmental discourse when he talks about the benefits of sport:

Geoff: It gets your brain fit fast and it can also train your brain in different ways. And you can think of different things to win the game or at least try and beat your guys at something.

For Geoff, part of the enjoyment of sport lies in the problem-solving aspect. However, the influence of the competitive discourse is again apparent, as the objective is to win.

Playing for Fun

The children, quite simply, loved playing sport. Children like sport for a range of reasons, but primarily sport is a source of enjoyment and fun. Some of the children expressed a dislike of certain sports, or of certain aspects of a sport, but every child interviewed stated that they enjoyed playing at least one sport.

SW: So what's so good about your soccer?

Joe (age 9-11 years): It's hard to explain but it just feels beautiful when I play it. It just feels real – rather than reading a book. Like it's good reading but when you're running around being active it really gets you sort of being happy.

SW: So it's fun and you enjoy it.

Joe: It makes you feel good too. It just makes you feel invincible sometimes. That's what it does to me.

The opportunity for physicality and being active was a key source of enjoyment for many of the children. A sense emerged that sport offered an opportunity for freedom and exhilaration through physical activity. Girls generally expressed enjoyment through running and dodging. The boys more commonly talked about physicality.

Natasha (age 6-8 years): It feels funny dodging people and I like running.

Josh: I like scoring tries and tackling.

Tane: I like accidentally bowling over people when I'm running and sometimes I can't stop.

Janelle: I like dodging.

Danny: In [rugby] league I like running straight into them.

Ultimately for these boys the rough and tumble which is legitimised in contact sports is a source of fun. However, girls such as Natasha and Janelle, liked to avoid physical contact. At these early ages there would appear to be limits on enjoyment associated with physicality, with no children revealing any pride in withstanding pain. When these children were asked what they disliked most about their sport, being injured was the most significant aspect.

A Sense of Fair Play

The strongest and most consistent message that emerged from the children interviewed related to a notion of 'fair play'. Coaching practices that focused on winning were perceived as being unfair. One of the most important aspects of sport for these children was that they got equal opportunities: to experience equal game time irrespective of gender or ability; to have the opportunity to try different positions; and to get regular touches of the ball. All of these practices would relate to the behaviours of coaches clearly influenced by the progressive-developmental discourse. For the children it is simply the importance of being treated fairly and a 'good coach' was one that treated children equally:

SW: Could you tell me about your coach?

Geoff (age 9-11 years): We're all friends with him and he doesn't treat us unfair, he treats us all equally. Even his son who is in the team [...] and that's what I like about it, he treats us all like we're his kids.

For Geoff, the coach-athlete relationship was more of a friendship and he clearly respected his coach. Although winning was important for these children, it was not important enough to treat children unfairly. A good coach was perceived to be one who treated children fairly and coaches perceived to be strongly influenced by winning were not held in the same high regard. The significance of winning to many coaches was apparent to a number of children.

SW: What's the most important thing about sport do you think?

Dave (age 9-11 years): To have fun, it's not if you win or lose. My coach thinks it's if you win or lose, but it's if you have fun.

Dave's depiction of sport here clearly competes with the practices he sees adopted by the coach. Dave's view of sport is firmly influenced by the fun discourse. While many of the children like winning, predominantly for them sport is fun. The over-riding principle and outcome for these children is that everyone has a turn, and one's abilities do not become the criterion for having access to the game.

SW: So if you were the coach would you keep the best players on or give everybody the same game time

A number of children (ages 9-11 years): The same game time.

SW: But if you kept your best players on you would have more chance of winning. [...] So are you saying it doesn't matter if you win or lose?

Jan: As long as everybody gets a turn.

Dave: It needs to be fun.

The children here are resistant to the win-at-all costs attitude which appears to be displayed by some coaches. The notion of fair play strongly emerges again as does

the belief expressed by Dave that sport is more about fun than winning. Some of the practices of the children's coaches though are not seen by the children to be fair:

Annie: [...] most of the time the boys are on the longest.

SW: Is that in touch rugby?

Annie: Yes, a mixed team.

SW: What do you think of that?

Annie: It's like saying that us girls aren't as good as the boys.

These examples would appear to indicate that these are competitive coaches who want to win. The best players are kept on in order to achieve a winning result. In mixed (boys and girls) sports from Annie's perspective, there is a clear message that girls are not as good as boys. It is interesting that the coach of a mixed team would appear to openly give more game time to boys than to girls. Given the influential role a coach can have on the emotional reactions of young children and their ongoing continuation in organised sport (Smith et al., 2007), the discriminatory coaching practices that appear to be exhibited here would have the potential to have an effect on Annie's self esteem and perception of herself as an athlete.

For children there is no one dominant discourse and they talk about sport in a very multi-faceted way. These children do like winning but sport for them is not an activity that is primarily about winning or losing. In making sense of sport, these children expressed insightful views that negotiated between sport as winning, sport as fun, and sport as a vehicle for athlete development. They put winning into perspective, acknowledged its existence, but accorded it a position of importance that was not pre-eminent. However, the seeming imbalance of the power relationship between children

and adult coaches sees children participating in a version of sport that often does not appear to mirror what they actually want.

Power, Discipline and the Compliant Athlete

It has been long recognised that coaches play a significant role in shaping children's experiences of sport (Keegan et al., 2009). When the children in this study talked about coaching practices, they regularly referred to the punitive disciplinary practices of their coaches:

Tane (age 6-8 years): My coach yells at me.

SW: Which sport is that in?

Tane: Soccer. Because I'm in midfield so you don't score many goals and then when I don't score a goal he yells at me.

SW: So how does that make you feel?

Tane: I hate my coach.

Natasha: Sometimes when they yell it makes me shoot goals and go faster. But sometimes it's bad because sometimes I drop the ball and the other team get the ball.

SW: How does it make you feel when you get yelled at for dropping the ball?

Natasha: Sometimes it makes me go faster and stuff but sometimes I can't.

The children do not like being shouted at. Tane also recognises that the coach is being unfair to him as the coach is playing him in a position that makes it difficult for him to score goals, but still yells at him when he doesn't score. What is interesting, though, is how Natasha perceives some positive benefits to the shouting if it makes you score. She is excusing the coach behaviour as long as there is a positive outcome. This positive outcome, perceived sporting success, is firmly situated within the competitive

discourse. Johns and Johns (2000) found that athletes will accept power relationships if they can find reasons to justify and internalise such structures, and it may be seen that Natasha has already started to acknowledge the truth that sport is about being successful and winning, even when talking about coach behaviour she dislikes.

This coach-athlete power relation imbalance is also apparent in the way that “disciplinary power is exercised through technologies of dominance” (Lang, 2010, p. 22). Technologies of dominance relate to the different strategies that are employed to exert power. For example, the children speak on a number of occasions of how coaches use exercise as punishment.

Ben (age 9-11 years): My tackle rugby coach is strict and if you talk you have to do push ups.

Mark: In league this team has to run around the field for every [score] they lose by.

SW: Do they actually have to run around the field if they lose?

Mark: When they come back to training they have to, like if they [lose] by two times [scores] then they have to run around the field two times.

This use of exercise to punish children was seemingly employed by some coaches to punish children when they played badly or lost. The practice of punishment to prevent repetition of an undesired behaviour is an old one (Foucault, 1975/1995). The ‘truth’ about sport that will emerge for children is that winning is of paramount importance, and losing is an extremely undesirable outcome. However, when talking about discipline, Foucault noted that “punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification-punishment. And it is this system that operates in the process of training and correction” (p. 180).

Tanya (age 6-8 years): In touch if you play good you get a certificate.

SW: You like getting a certificate?

Andy: That's what I like about it too.

Marcus: And I like the prize giving to see who gets the most improved player and the best player, but I haven't got one of those yet.

Certificates and prizes are the primary type of gratification for children in this system. These children liked getting rewarded and these rewards normally related to playing the game well or being successful. In the operation of this dual gratification-punishment system, children are punished if they do not play well or try hard enough, and praised and rewarded when the coaches perceive they have been successful.

Coaches who appear to be firmly positioned within the competitive discourse use their power to support coaching practices that clash with the guidelines and resources provided for them by their sporting bodies. Children commonly talked about how they were not exposed to different positions on the field/court.

John (age 6-8 years): In soccer I was always in defence, it was really boring.

SW: Would you like to play different positions?

A number of children: YES

SW: Put your hands up if would like to play a position you've never played before.

SW: That's everybody here!!

Danny: Last season in tackle rugby I actually asked my coach can I please be winger and he said "we'll see".

The children in all groups talked about how some coaches played players in certain positions because that is where their skills were. Rather than focusing on broader

and longer term skill development, the coach's focus would appear to be on using the players as effectively as possible to win the game.

However, the effect of some of these coaching behaviours on the children can have the opposite effect to that desired:

Marcus (age 6-8 years): [in touch rugby] I had the ball and was about to score a try. I'm like running as fast as I can, then he [my coach shouts] puts me off and I look backwards and slow down and then I get touched and I get really peeved off.

SW: So you don't score the try?

Marcus: Yeah.

As shown in the above example, rather than eliciting behaviours that lead to winning, the coaches' comments have the potential to distract and deter.

Looked at simplistically, it would be easy to assume that coaches hold total power over the children in their teams. As adults (and as coaches) they hold a position of authority and children are expected to follow their instructions. Although there is a power imbalance here between adult and child, children do offer resistance and display often creative strategies to cope and deal with what they perceive to be inappropriate coach behaviour:

Samantha (age 9-11 years): The one thing I don't like about the boy coach we have [in touch rugby], when he's talking – well when he's yelling, he spits. [...] so I try and stay away from him. That's why I say "I'm not going on the wing." Because like I stay in the middle

Ben: Yeah, it's really annoying [when the adults yell]. Sometimes I ignore them.

Kath: I ignore our coach.

SW: You ignore your coach. How many people ignore their coach?

Megan: Sometimes

Jake: Sometimes

SW: OK, that's 6 of you [out of 9].

Again, the impact of the coaches' behaviour would appear to have the opposite effect to what the coach wants. By resisting, children are exerting their own power. They often choose to ignore the coach, or in Samantha's instance, get as far away from the coach as possible during the game.

Implications for Children's Sport

There is evidence that children in New Zealand, as elsewhere, are withdrawing from organised sports as they move into adolescence (Thomson, 2000). Much of the literature and guidelines produced by government agencies is driven by a desire to attract children to, and maintain an interest in playing sport into adulthood. If children continue to perceive their sporting experiences in a negative light, then they will continue to wield the most powerful tool in their armoury; totally withdrawing and disengaging from sport.

SW: Why did you stop playing cricket Geoff?

Geoff (age 9-11 years): It just didn't appeal to me anymore, that's all.

SW: OK.

Geoff: But I also began to play soccer because I had a better coach than cricket. I thought it would be a better way to spend my time [...]

SW: So why is your coach better at soccer do you think?

Geoff: Because he always treats us as his equals [...] but the coaches I don't really like is they only care about winning. They don't care about how the team feels [...] or they don't care about how other people feel.

SW: So if your soccer coach was your cricket coach.....

Geoff: I'd still be doing cricket.

SECTION 9: Referees and Coaches

Introduction

This section presents the findings of an electronic survey that was administered to coaches and referees/umpires (hereafter referred to as referees).

Methods

This component of the study was a two stage cross-sectional descriptive study that utilised an electronic survey software package, SelectSurveyASP Advanced version 8.1.5 (ClassAppsCom ©2004). The survey was designed to be relevant to both coaches and referees. The questionnaire contained both closed and open-ended questions. The target population were coaches and referees of children's (ages 6 to 11 years) four team sports: rugby union, touch rugby, netball, and soccer. The setting included two districts in the Greater Auckland area. The first stage of the study selected sports organisations representative of the four team sports and the second stage invited all eligible coaches and referees to participate.

Participants

Sports organisations.

A method of purposive sampling was adopted to identify four sports organisations responsible for the coordination and organisation of the four team sports that were the focus of this study. Inclusion criterion for sports organisations was that they held contact details of volunteer referees and coaches involved in children's sport.

Coaches and referees.

The second stage was to sample all eligible coaches and referees of children's sports, whose names were held on the sports organisations' databases.

Instrument

Development and design.

Preliminary conversations with sports organisations revealed that e-mail addresses were the only contact details a number of these organisations had for their coaches and referees, which effectively ruled out the use of a postal questionnaire. The online survey was designed to be one web page only, so respondents could clearly see how long the survey would take to complete without having to progress through multiple screens. The number of questions was limited to ten (refer to Appendix B for survey details), with eight compulsory closed questions, and two optional open-ended questions.

Data storage and security.

Participants entered their data directly into a structured query language (SQL) database, via the SelectSurveyASP website. Participants' personal information was limited to age range (16-20 years, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61 and over), gender, role (coach or referee), and sport. The information held on the database was accessible only to the principal researcher.

Procedure

In May and June 2009, four regional sports associations were approached inviting them to participate. Representatives from all four organisations expressed an interest in their organisation participating. Each of the organisations held coach and referee contact information on a database, however, the regional touch rugby organisation only held a limited number of contacts on their database. Subsequently, in June 2009, a charitable sports trust that coordinated season long competitions for touch rugby and soccer for children was also invited to participate. Refer to Table 14 for an overview of the participating organisations.

Table 14: *Participating Sports Organisations*

Type	Sports Co-ordinated
RSO	Rugby
RSO	Netball
RSO	Touch
RSO	Soccer
Charitable Sports Trust	Touch and Soccer

E-mail invitations to complete the online survey were distributed by these organisations to coaches and referees (aged 16 years or over) whose e-mail addresses were held on their databases. The e-mail included an invitation to participate, participant information, and an embedded link to the electronic survey (URL). Table 15 provides an overview of the participants, by sport.

Table 15: *Potential Participants by Sport*

Sport	Coaches	Referees	Combined ^a	Total
Rugby	330	148	0	478
Soccer	350	150	0	500
Touch	0	0	104	104
Netball	0	0	98	98
Total	680	298	202	1180

^a Three of the organisations held all volunteer contact information together, with no means of differentiating between roles.

The survey was launched in mid-August 2009 and closed at the beginning of October. Completion and submission of the online survey denoted informed consent to participate.

Data Analysis

The data was exported from the survey software package into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Quantitative data analysis of the closed questions was descriptive and utilised cross-tabulations between groups of interest. Fisher's exact test was used to determine associations between cross-tabulated categorical variables. These analyses were performed using Stata version 10.0 (StataCorp, College Station, TX, USA) and a level of 5% was used to define statistical significance.

There were two open-ended questions included in the survey. Analysis of the qualitative data was basic qualitative descriptive (Sandelowski, 2000) and a qualitative data analysis software tool, Weft QDA (Fenton, 2006), was utilised to sort the qualitative data into key categories and sub-categories.

Results

Response Rates

A total of 1,180 e-mails were sent to coaches and referees inviting them to complete the online survey. A total of 287 surveys were completed – a response rate of 24.3%.

Gender and Age Groups

Table 16 provides a breakdown of the respondents' age groups and gender. A significant difference was identified in the age distribution by gender (Fishers' exact test, $p=0.010$). There was a relatively even distribution of female respondents between the 31 to 40 years age range (40.2%) and the 41 to 50 years age range (45.6%). However, for males, there was a noticeable increase from the 31-40 years age range bracket (30.2%) to the older 41-50 years age range bracket (55.4%).

Table 16: *Respondents by Age Group and Gender*

Age	Female		Male		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
16-20	7	(7.6)	4	(2.0)	11	(3.8)
21-30	4	(4.3)	4	(2.0)	8	(2.8)
31-40	37	(40.2)	59	(30.2)	96	(33.4)
41-50	42	(45.6)	108	(55.4)	150	(52.3)
51-60	2	(2.2)	17	(8.7)	19	(6.6)
61+	0	(0)	3	(1.5)	3	(1.0)
Total	92	(100)	195	(100)	287	(100)

Role Played in Children's Sport

Of the 287 respondents, 49.5% (n=142) were coaches, 15.3% (n=44) were referees, 29.6% (n=85) performed both roles, and 5.6% (n=16) were not currently coaching or refereeing.

Sport Involvement

Figure 2 graphically depicts an overview of respondents' specific sport involvement.

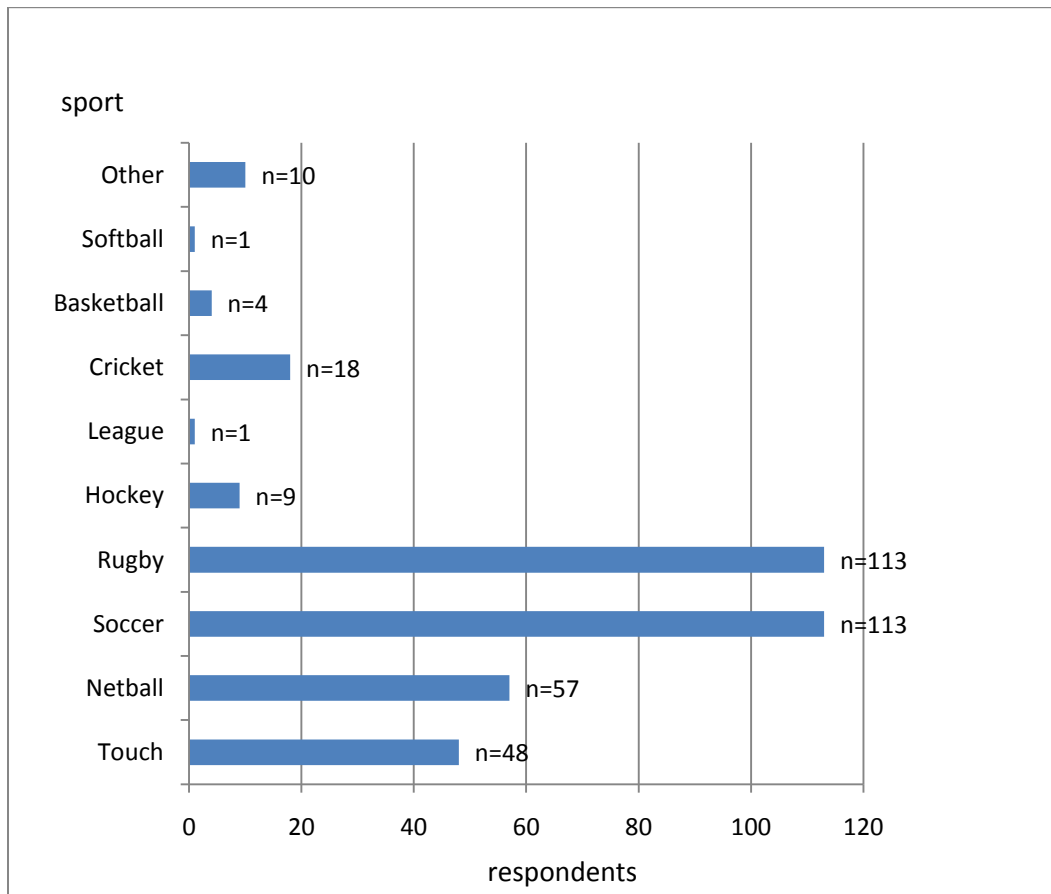


Figure 2: *The Sports Respondents Coached or Refereed*

Commitment to Coaching and Refereeing

Table 17 provides an overview of respondents' involvement in sport.

Table 17: *Number of Years and Frequency of Coaching or Refereeing*

Number of Years	n	(%)	Coaching / Refereeing	n	(%)
Coaching / Refereeing			frequency		
0-1	55	(19.2)	More than once a week	141	(49.1)
2-3	96	(33.4)	Every or most weeks	120	(41.8)
4-5	57	(19.9)	Sometimes	17	(5.9)
6 or more	79	(27.5)	Not very often	9	(3.1)
Total	287	(100)	Total	287	(100)

Frequency of Inappropriate Parental Behaviour Observed

To establish coaches and referees' perceptions of the frequency of inappropriate behaviours, respondents were asked how regularly they witnessed inappropriate parental

behaviour at children's sporting events. Figure 3 presents a bar-chart of the distribution of responses to this question.

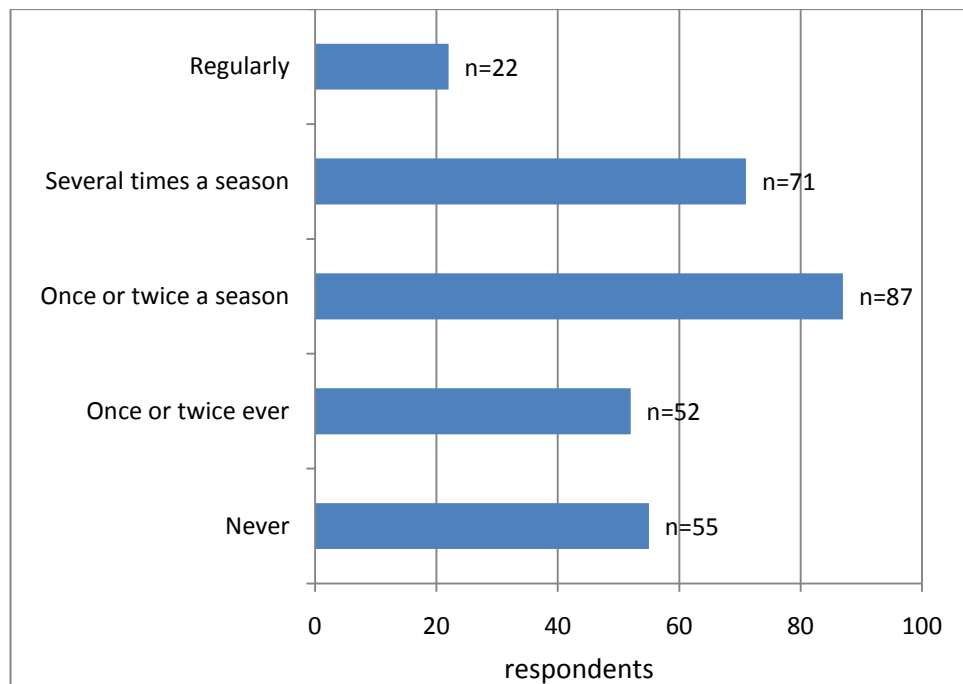


Figure 3: *Frequency of Inappropriate Parental Behaviour Observed by Respondents*

Testing the effects of gender, role, and sport on reporting of frequency of inappropriate parental behaviour.

An overview of the reported frequencies of inappropriate parental behaviour observed cross-tabulated with respondent gender, role and sport is presented in Table 18. A significant difference was identified in the reporting of the frequency of these behaviours by respondent gender (Fishers' exact test, $p=0.013$). Proportionally more males than females reported witnessing higher frequencies of inappropriate parental behaviour, with 67.7% of males ($n=132$) reporting they had witnessed these behaviours at least once or twice a season; whereas only 52.2% of female respondents ($n=48$) reported observations of similar frequencies.

Table 18: *Frequency of Inappropriate Parental Behaviour Observed by Respondent Gender, Role, and Sport*

	Regularly observed		Several times a season		Once or twice a season		Once or twice ever		Never		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
<i>Gender</i>												
Male	14	(7.2)	54	(27.7)	64	(32.8)	25	(12.8)	38	(19.5)	195	(100)
Female	8	(8.7)	17	(18.5)	23	(25.0)	27	(29.3)	17	(18.5)	92	(100)
<i>Role</i>												
Coach	6	(4.2)	24	(16.9)	48	(33.8)	32	(22.5)	32	(22.5)	142	(100)
Referee	6	(13.6)	14	(31.8)	10	(22.7)	5	(11.4)	9	(20.4)	44	(100)
Both	10	(11.8)	29	(34.1)	24	(28.2)	12	(14.1)	10	(11.8)	85	(100)
None	0	(0.0)	4	(25.0)	5	(31.2)	3	(18.7)	4	(25.0)	16	(100)
<i>currently</i>												
<i>Sport^a</i>												
Netball	3	(7.0)	8	(18.6)	10	(23.2)	12	(27.9)	10	(23.2)	43	(100)
Touch	1	(12.5)	3	(37.5)	2	(25.0)	2	(25.0)	0	(0.0)	8	(100)
Rugby	6	(8.1)	23	(31.1)	19	(25.7)	9	(12.2)	17	(22.3)	74	(100)
Soccer	4	(4.6)	21	(24.4)	26	(30.2)	15	(17.4)	20	(23.2)	86	(100)

^a A number of respondents (n=76) coached or refereed more than one sport. The data in this section of the table represents respondents who identified with one sport only.

A further significant difference (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.025$) was identified in the reporting of these behaviours by respondent role. Respondents who identified that they performed the role of referee reported observing higher frequencies of inappropriate behaviours than those respondents who identified as coaches only. Of the respondents who were referees only, 74.1% ($n=63$) reported observing inappropriate parental behaviour at least once or twice a season, compared to 68.2% ($n=30$) of those who identified as coaches and referees, and 54.9% ($n=78$) of respondents who were coaches only. This finding suggested that referees have a different perception of what is considered to be inappropriate parental behaviour.

Further analysis revealed no differences in the reporting of the frequency of inappropriate parental behaviour between sports (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.638$).

Nature of Inappropriate Behaviour Observed

Respondents were asked to provide details of any inappropriate behaviour that they witnessed. This question was open-ended and responses were analysed to identify the key and dominant themes. For the 231 (80.5%) respondents to this question, the key themes that emerged were:

- *Abusive behaviour:* 83.5% of these respondents ($n=193$) referred to incidents of abusive verbal behaviour they had witnessed, 63.2% ($n=146$) referred to verbal abuse directed at children, and 62.7% ($n=145$) referred to incidents of verbal abuse aimed at referees.
- *Inappropriate and aggressive coaching behaviour:* 29% ($n=67$).
- *Biased refereeing/umpiring:* 15.5% ($n=36$).
- *Physical confrontation:* Ten respondents stated that they had witnessed actual violence and/or physical confrontations involving parents/coaches during children's sports games.

Ongoing Concerns with Parental Behaviour

Respondents were asked if they had concerns about inappropriate parental behaviour at children's sporting events: 60.3% (n=173) of respondents stated that they did have concerns; and 39.7% (n=114) of respondents stated they had no concerns.

Testing the effects of gender, role, and sport on reporting of ongoing concerns with parental behaviour.

The reporting of ongoing concerns with parental behaviour cross-tabulated with respondents' gender, role, and sport is presented in Table 19.

Analysis revealed no association between either the gender of the respondent and ongoing concerns with parental behaviour (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.898$), or the respondent's sport and reporting of ongoing concerns (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.794$). However, a significant association was identified between reporting of ongoing concerns and respondent's role (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.023$), with 70.6% (n=60) of those who identified as coaches and referees, and 68.2% (n=30) of referees stating they had ongoing concerns with parental behaviour at children's sporting events. In comparison, only 53.5% (n=76) of coaches expressed similar concerns. Again, these findings suggest that perspectives of inappropriate parental behaviour differ between coaches and those who have performed the role of referee.

Table 19: *Ongoing Concern with Parental Behaviour by Respondent Gender, Role, and Sport*

	Have Concerns		No Concerns		Total	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
<i>Gender</i>						
Male	117	(60.0)	78	(40.0)	195	(100)
Female	56	(60.9)	36	(39.1)	92	(100)
<i>Role</i>						
Coach	76	(53.5)	66	(46.5)	142	(100)
Referee	30	(68.2)	14	(31.8)	44	(100)
Both	60	(70.6)	25	(29.4)	85	(100)
None	7	(43.7)	9	(56.2)	16	(100)
<i>currently</i>						
<i>Sport^a</i>						
Netball	24	(55.8)	19	(44.2)	43	(100)
Touch	6	(75.0)	2	(25.0)	8	(100)
Rugby	45	(60.8)	29	(39.2)	74	(100)
Soccer	50	(58.1)	36	(41.9)	86	(100)

^a A number of respondents (n=76) coached or refereed more than one sport. The data in this section of the table represents respondents who identified with one sport only.

Steps to improve parental behaviour.

Respondents were asked to identify steps that they believed could be taken to improve parental behaviour, with 66.2% (n=190) of respondents answering this open-ended question. The key themes that emerged were:

- *Education:* 42.6% (n=81) of respondents to this question believed that education was the key to improving behaviour.
- *Punitive action to be taken by sports organisations:* 38.4% (n=73).
- *Sporting organisations to take more responsibility:* 20% (n=38).
- *Coaches to enforce parental behaviour guidelines:* 13.6% (n=26).
- *Improving refereeing standards:* 8.9% (n=17).

Discussion

In relation to the frequency of inappropriate parental behaviour observed by coaches and referees, a significant difference was found in the reporting of the frequency of these behaviours by gender, with male respondents reporting that they had observed more frequent occurrences of inappropriate behaviour than females. As respondents who were involved with rugby union only were predominantly male (93.3%, n=70), and respondents who were involved with netball only were predominantly female (95.3%, n=41), it was pertinent to examine the differences in frequency of reporting between sports. However, no significant difference was found in the frequencies of reported inappropriate behaviour by sport. The gender differences identified here are of interest. As no significant differences were identified in the reporting of inappropriate behaviour by sport, it is possible that the presence of a female coach or referee may have an impact on the types of behaviours that are occurring on the sidelines. Although there is no evidence to currently support this hypothesis, this is certainly an area worthy of consideration for future research.

An interesting difference did emerge in the perception of inappropriate behaviour frequency between referees and coaches. Of those respondents who performed the sole role of referee, 74.1% (n=63) reported that they observed inappropriate behaviour at least once or twice a season. This was compared to 54.9% (n=78) of those who only coached. In addition, 68.2% (n=30) of respondents who performed a dual role of coach and referee reported observations of a similar frequency. These findings suggest that referees, who are potentially the recipients of verbal abuse, have quite different views to coaches on the frequency of inappropriate behaviours. In accounting details of the inappropriate behaviour observed, 67.7% (n=132) of all respondents reported witnessing verbal abuse aimed at referees. Given the relatively high volume of negative comments made by coaches seen in the coach observation

phase of this study, it is possible that coaches are either unaware, or normalise language that non-coaches are more likely to see as abusive.

The perception of referees that inappropriate parental behaviour was more common than recognised by coaches was also apparent in the responses to the question that asked if respondents had concerns about parental behaviour in children's sport. Of those respondents who performed the dual role of coach and referee, 70.6% (n=60) expressed concerns; 68.2% (n=30) of referees had concerns; and only 53.5% (n=76) of coaches expressed a concern.

The reports of verbal abuse that targeted referees suggested that this practice was relatively commonplace and normalised.

Coach and referee (Soccer): Criticising referees' decisions openly and offensively, even if it's one of their mates reffing. Abusing the ref in soccer is so accepted that one coach who gave me a gobful [verbal abuse] didn't even realise he was doing it ("did I say that out loud?").

It was clear that this respondent's role as a referee gave him a personal insight into instances of verbal abuse that occurred. He refers to the normalisation of this practice in that it is now "so accepted" that individuals are not aware of their own behaviour and even abuse their own friends.

The abuse of referees has been identified as a source of stress and a cause of burnout for referees in a range of sports (Anshel & Weinberg, 1995; Rainey, 1995). However, there is no evidence in the peer reviewed literature of studies that have studied referees specifically involved with children's sport. The evidence from the findings of this study suggest that the abuse which commonly occurs in adult

competitive sport is also common in children's sport, even for children up to the age of 7 years:

Referee (Touch): The coach became too emotional and forgot that these kids were only about 6 or 7 years old and became quite scared when he began swearing. He was quite intimidating to a junior referee that was also going through training as well.

Behaviour that is driven by an over-riding focus on winning is apparently occurring in sport for children as young as 6 years of age. Although of interest, the main focus of this study was on the impact of adult behaviour on children themselves. This over competitive behaviour by parents and coaches also results in verbal abuse that is directed at children. Of the respondents who detailed reports of inappropriate behaviour, 63.2% (n=146) referred to verbal abuse that targeted children.

Coach (Rugby): Parents verbally abusing their own child and others on the field. Parents mocking other children in front of another child's parents. Parents arguing amongst themselves.

A number of children would appear to be regularly subjected to verbal abuse by parents exhibiting over-competitive behaviour. The findings here support claims that aggressive sports-related spectator behaviour which has traditionally been associated with professional sport is now a regular feature of children's sport (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). The most extreme examples of inappropriate behaviour identified related to acts of physical aggression. There were ten accounts of behaviour that related to acts of violence, aggression or physical threats.

Rugby (Coach and referee): I had to separate the coaches who had a stand-off during a J8 game (5-year olds).

Rugby (Coach): [During an 11-year olds rugby game] the referee called the game off about half way through the second half. He had by this stage already

warned both the coach and the parents on the touch line to control the vitriol and abusive foul language that was clearly audible around the field and in this case around the local residential area. After asking the coach to leave the area of the rugby fields (which was ignored) he [the coach] and his supporting parents began to edge onto the field at which point, fearing for his physical safety, he [the referee] abandoned the game.

Although the number of respondents who related accounts of extreme behaviour were relatively small (3.5% of all 287 respondents), ten occurrences of physical aggression would suggest that this type of behaviour is not uncommon. The influences of background anger can be upsetting for any children who witness these events, but especially so for a child who sees their own parent involved (Omli & La Voi, 2009).

A population of interest who emerged in this phase of the study were the relatively large numbers of coaches and referees (n=55, 19.2%) who stated that they had never witnessed inappropriate parental behaviour in children's sports, and those who stated that they did not have concerns about sideline behaviour (n=114, 39.7%). Due to the subjective nature relating to the interpretation of what is and what is not inappropriate behaviour, this population would be of interest for further study. Although some of the respondents stated they had no ongoing concerns with inappropriate behaviour, they still took the opportunity to respond to the question which asked what steps could be taken to address this behaviour. Some of these responses were quite revealing:

Coach (Soccer): I believe there is too much PC-ness amongst children's sporting games. It needs to be like the old days and kids just get to play sport. It is surveys like this that make too many rules for parents and in the end it will turn parents off putting their kids into sports, because of the PC rules attached to it. There is no need to create any more PC rules for parents to adhere to. Thank you.

This coach's view was one that the rugby union administrator referred to (see Section 5), where any action by his regional rugby organisation to address over-competitive behaviour was regularly met with a response that these actions were "politically correct", and sport was about winning. Parents shouting on the touchline is not only normalised, but it is perceived by many to be acceptable behaviour.

The complexity of the problem is probably best summed up by a respondent who did express concerns about ongoing behaviour. When asked what steps could be taken to improve this behaviour:

Referee (Soccer): Get everybody to live in an ideal world! Crikey is there enough room here to describe how to change the world, because it is too easily accepted that referee/coach/player abuse/criticism is ok.

A sense of helplessness emerges here which was echoed in the perspectives of sport administrators (see Section 5). There is a perception that the behaviour is so embedded and normalised that it is almost impossible to confront.

Limitations

Online surveys have tended to attract lower response rates than paper ones (Nulty, 2008) and as such, the 24.3% response rate in this study was not surprising. This phase of the study relied very much on the support of the sporting organisations responsible for the provision and administration of the four team sports that were the focus of this study. However, with only 6% of all volunteers who responded to the SPARC commissioned survey of volunteers in New Zealand sport being referees (Kazakov & Johnson, 2008), a reasonable representation of coaches and referees across

the four sports was still achieved in this study (63.2% of respondents coached, 44.9% refereed).

The views of referees and coaches provide only one of a range of perspectives in the overall study. As stated in relation to the survey findings from parents and children (refer Section 7), it is reasonable to abstract, rather than generalise, the findings from this sample to the target population of coaches and referees involved in the delivery of children's team sports in New Zealand (Rothman & Greenland, 1998).

SECTION 10: Discussion

Introduction

To provide a framework for this discussion chapter, the four key aims of the study will each be dealt with in turn. These aims were to:

- identify the nature of parent behaviour at children's sporting events;
- establish the prevalence of these behaviours at children's sporting events;
- examine the effect of these sideline behaviours on the key stakeholders involved in children's sport; and
- explore the impact of these sideline behaviours on children's enjoyment of sport.

The Nature of Sideline Behaviour at Children's Sporting Events

Through the classification of behaviours in the observation phase, it was possible to establish the nature of coaching behaviours exhibited. The highest percentage of verbal comments recorded fell into the neutral category (43%), with 35.4% of comments being classified as positive, and 21.6% as negative. The nature of verbal behaviours observed clearly followed a pattern of regular instruction, with children being praised if they executed a skill well, and scolded if they did not. Spectator parental behaviours were not directly observed, but evidence relating to both positive and negative parental behaviours was forthcoming from all other components of this study.

Although the focus group interviews with administrators and children revealed a number of areas of concern with adult behaviour, this study also produced evidence of a range of positive behaviours exhibited by both coaches and parents. The use of

systematic observation revealed that coaches made a greater percentage of positive comments (35.4%) than negative comments (21.6%). The positive aspects of children's sport were also visible in the findings of the surveys conducted with parents, coaches and referees. Although 60.3% of coaches and referees expressed ongoing concerns with adult behaviour at children's sporting events, many coaches/referees (39.7%) stated they had no concerns whatsoever. Of the parents surveyed, only 19.8% believed that adults had adversely impacted upon their child's enjoyment of sport. The focus group interviews with both administrators and children revealed a number of positive stories about coaches:

Soccer administrator: We've got a coach from [name omitted] University who is doing some work for us and you get him on that field and you see those kids take off. It doesn't matter if it's a parent or a qualified coach, if they've got that affinity and that ability to talk to those kids on the sideline, it's just so powerful.

The following excerpt is from one of the children's focus groups:

Boy (age 6-8 years): My touch coach chooses the right decisions. He's really good and people like, really bad players, who started this year have just improved so much. You don't have to just pick the good players. So the more times the bad players go on, the more they learn about positions.

These positive stories reinforced the fact that there are a number of coaches exhibiting extremely supportive behaviours.

Establishing the nature of inappropriate behaviours was more problematic. One of the problems posed in this study related to the necessarily subjective nature of the interpretation of the term 'inappropriate behaviour'. It is reasonable to assume that adult behaviour such as swearing or yelling at children would be almost universally accepted as being inappropriate. However, constant criticism of children has also been linked

with children's lack of enjoyment of sport (Petlichkoff, 1993); associated with children dropping out of competitive sport (Gould & Petlichkoff, 1988; Thomson, 2000); and said to adversely impact upon a child's motor skill development (Randall & McKenzie, 1987). The findings from the observations of coaches, and from the focus group interviews conducted with both the sport administrators and the children suggested that inappropriate behaviours were more common than acknowledged by many parents, coaches and referees.

In all phases of this study, there was evidence of extreme incidents of behaviour by both coaches and parents. One Saturday morning during the observational phase of this study, three rugby union matches were observed. The first match involved 7 to 8-year olds who were predominantly boys. The coach recorded in a notebook the names of children who missed tackles or did not tackle using what the coach perceived to be correct technique, referring to them as "jersey pullers". The coach consistently ridiculed these children:

Rugby Coach: He ran straight through you there, mate, you didn't even try. Jersey puller, jersey puller! How many jersey pullers do we have out there today?

The second match observed that morning was made up of 6 and 7-year old boys. This game ended about ten minutes early as one of the coaches marched onto the field and verbally abused the referee. An official from the RSO was observing the game and came onto the field to try and placate the coach. This was not possible and the coach marched his team off the field and the game was abandoned.

The third game observed that morning was for 9 and 10-year old boys and involved an exceptionally competitive coach, who got increasingly agitated as the game neared its climax:

Rugby Coach: Kick it to the corner! Kick it to the corner! Aw fuck's sake! If they score now they will win it. Aw fuck's sake, you turned it over again!

Through systematic observation, as seen in Section 6, it was possible to establish the nature of the behaviour exhibited by coaches. The nature of the extreme examples of behaviour witnessed in three separate games that morning left a lasting impression and indicated that inappropriate coaching behaviour, in rugby union at least, was certainly not uncommon.

The Prevalence of Identified Behaviours at Children's Sporting Events

The reliance on media reports for information relating to adult behaviour at children's sporting events in New Zealand made it fundamentally important to provide evidence relating to the prevalence and frequency of sideline behaviours exhibited by adults. The use of systematic observation was a key component in addressing this research aim.

The precise breakdown of the coach comments recorded was provided and discussed in Section 6. The original studies that observed adult spectator behaviour found that parents spent considerable time silently watching their children playing sport (Randall & McKenzie, 1987; Walley et al., 1982). Coaches, not surprisingly, would appear to be considerably more vocal. In all 72 games observed in this current study, coaches made regular verbal comments throughout the games.

In drawing comparisons of coach behaviour between the four team sports, interesting differences emerged. Rugby union coaches did not compare favourably with

coaches from the other three sports in a range of aspects. Rugby union coaches made the lowest percentage of positive comments (26.5%), and the highest percentage of negative comments (23%). Rugby union coaches also recorded the highest rate of negative comments that targeted referees. The evidence that indicated that rugby union coaches were less positive than coaches from other sports was of interest. The rugby union administrator interviewed in the focus group had been critical of the competitive structures of children's sport put in place by other sports. He believed that the over-competitive behaviour exhibited by parents and coaches logically reflected the competitive structures that were in place:

Rugby administrator: From an outsider's view we have of say of games like soccer and basketball, they get very elite very quickly. And so the pressure goes on kids so quickly that is why so many kids change sport at roughly the ages of 11, 12, and 13. That's why [one soccer club I know] has something like 2,000 junior members and coming to the age of 15 and over the age of 15 they've got about 200. So we are very much supportive that under the age of 12 [rugby] is all participation based.

A number of strategies had been introduced by the RSO that this sports administrator represented. Rugby union for children was meant to be non-competitive, in the sense that the RSO did not record the scores, and no league tables were maintained. The construction of sport by the RSO was primarily aimed at long term skill development, and in creating an environment that was conducive to children continuing to play rugby union into adolescence. All other sports included in this study had quite different competition structures in place. Although there was a difference between sports as to the age when the maintenance of league tables was introduced for children, scores of individual games were recorded for teams at all ages. In spite of these efforts by the RSO to create a non-competitive environment, the observation

findings suggest that the most competitive behaviours were exhibited by rugby union coaches.

Findings from the observations also indicated that coaches from all sports made significantly less positive comments if their team was losing. This suggests that the primary focus for many coaches was on winning, as opposed to athlete development, and praise equated to success through winning. In all of the 72 games observed children were told off for not executing a skill correctly, or making what the coach perceived to be poor decisions.

The survey administered to coaches and referees also provided information in relation to the prevalence and frequency of inappropriate coach and parent behaviour at children's sporting events. Although it needs to be acknowledged that the answers represented the necessarily subjective interpretation of the participants, 62.7% of coaches and referees reported that they observed inappropriate parental or coach behaviour at least once or twice a season. As discussed in Section 9, the perception of referees was significantly different to that of coaches, with 74.1% of those who performed the sole role of referee stating that they witnessed this type of behaviour at least once or twice a season, compared to 54.9% of coaches.

For many, it would appear that shouting at children is an acceptable part of sport. Although illuminating, the opinions of coaches, referees, and parents expressed in the survey responses do not establish the prevalence of different behaviours, rather they illustrate more the quite diverse meanings these adult participants attribute to children's sport. The findings of the observations, however, establish the prevalence of both positive and negative behaviours for coaches, and indicate that the coaching style adopted by the majority of coaches is predominantly instructional in nature.

The Effect of Sideline Behaviours on the Key Stakeholders involved in Children's Sport

During the design phase of this study, the key stakeholders were identified as being sport administrators, coaches, referees, parents, and the children themselves. A strong sense of frustration with inappropriate adult behaviour, especially with over-competitive coach behaviour, emerged from the interview with sport administrators. Many of the administrators expressed a sense of helplessness in dealing with this behaviour.

Soccer Administrator: You always hear a lot of parents will have positive things to say about the coaches regardless, you know, “well done”, “they are giving up their time”, “great that they put their hand up”. But the big issue I have is that they can do a lot of damage if they are not the right people. This is primarily an issue for the kids, and because they are such critical mentors to those kids, not just in their game but in their whole lives. [...]We need to have a better filtering system for assigning coaches and giving them the support.

Children's sport has a heavy reliance on volunteer parent involvement, but the statement that “we need to have a better filtering system” indicates the frustration that, this administrator at least, had with the type of parent who volunteered as a coach. A further complexity of the volunteer issue was highlighted by a parent who responded to the surveys completed by parents and children:

Mother: When my 6 year old son played soccer last year. I was the only parent present at the beginning and ended up having to coach.

The impact of the volunteer issue for parents was apparent here in that many parents themselves did not feel adequately prepared or qualified to coach. The rugby union administrator noted that rugby, especially, was perceived to be a very difficult

sport to coach for a number of reasons. In spite of the fact that rugby union had compulsory introductory coaching courses for new volunteers, they still found it difficult to attract coaches.

Frustration with coaches was also expressed by coaches themselves:

Rugby coach: It should be the coaches' responsibility to control the parents. However, most coaches don't have the skills to do this. Make the coaches responsible! Have strict guidelines that the coaches must enforce otherwise they pay the consequences. Then there must be a huge push to educate coaches on how to manage and run a team properly. At the moment there is a shortage of coaches and therefore we are getting whoever puts their hand up. The people putting their hands up are unfortunately not able to cope with the challenges that are being put in front of them as they don't have the skills.

The major impact on the administrators appeared to be frustration with coach behaviour when there were no strategies in place to deal with issues, or frustration with the resistance from coaches and parents to the strategies that were in place (rugby union and netball). The rugby union administrator was consistently faced with accusations that any strategies his organisation put in place to deal with over-competitive behaviour were perceived to be "politically correct" (PC). This conflict over the competitive nature of sport revealed itself also in the responses to the surveys completed by coaches and referees. Although some believed children's sport should be about winning and anything that contradicted this was branded as PC, the following response by another participant reflected the often diverse views that were presented:

Rugby referee and coach: We need to reduce tolerance to people who describe it [the strategies put in place] as "PC rubbish" We need to increase ease of reporting [incidents] and have firmer penalties.

The issue of refereeing was a recurring theme throughout the study. The impact of sideline behaviour on referees was apparent from a range of sources. Findings from the observations showed that the majority of the negative comments made by coaches were aimed at the team or individual players, but indicated that the percentage of negative comments targeting referees was greater for touch rugby and rugby union coaches than netball and soccer coaches. Concerns have been expressed elsewhere about the negative effects of sideline abuse on referees (Anshel & Weinberg, 1995; Rainey, 1995). In this current study, concern with abuse directed at referees was expressed by a range of participants. In the findings of the surveys completed by parents, 16.1% of incidents of verbal abuse reported were targeted at referees; 62.7% of the inappropriate behaviours reported by coaches and referees related to verbal abuse aimed at referees; and the sports administrators talked about abuse at referees being normalised practices in their sports:

Touch administrator: It's been incredible - the abuse to referees about how they are not refereeing properly.

However, the rugby union administrator interviewed in the focus group stated that many of the complaints he dealt with related to complaints about poor or perceived sub-standard refereeing. His response to these complaints was insightful and possibly gave these complainants a perspective they had not considered:

Rugby administrator: When I get a complaint I go back to them and say the referee will make mistakes. And the first thing I kind of say is "Well if the All Blacks are the best team in New Zealand, where would your team rank? And therefore if you are getting a referee at what level do you expect the referee to be? Would you expect him to be an All Black referee or at your level?" And that tends to kind of slow it down a little bit.

As can be seen, the effect of sideline behaviour, particularly of the inappropriate kind, is felt by a range of stakeholders involved in children's sport. In dealing with complaints, the administrators tended to more regularly deal with negative aspects. Administrators were frustrated with the types of people who tended to volunteer as coaches and were concerned with their behaviour. Parents, on the other hand, tended to feel that they were inadequately prepared to coach. Along with the children, referees were the targets of verbal sideline abuse and not surprisingly referees were found to be more aware of inappropriate behaviour than coaches. A feeling emerged from the coaches also that poor refereeing was a causal factor for much of the sideline abuse that occurred. However, the majority of the inappropriate behaviour observed by parents, coaches, and referees related to behaviours that adversely impacted upon children's enjoyment of sport

The Impact of Sideline Behaviours on Children's Enjoyment of Sport.

Enjoyment of sport has been identified as a key motivator for children's commitment to sport (Scanlan et al., 1993), and a lack of enjoyment has been strongly linked with children withdrawing from competitive sport (Gould & Horn, 1984). The role of the coach was closely identified with enjoyment by the children interviewed in the focus groups:

SW: So what's more fun, play station or playing sport?

Josh (age 9-11 years): Playing sport if you've got a good coach but I'd say play station if you don't.

All phases of this study revealed evidence of coaching practices and adult behaviour that could potentially adversely impact upon a child's enjoyment of sport. These practices included: verbal abuse directed at children by both coaches and parents; over-competitive coaching behaviours that resulted in children getting unequal game-

time and not being exposed to different playing positions; children being punished for making mistakes or for losing; and aggressive altercations between adults which have a damaging effect on any children witnessing this type of behaviour.

Verbal Abuse: “My coach yells at me”

Of the parents who reported that they had witnessed incidents of verbal abuse, 77.4% of these parents’ reports related to abuse that targeted children. Similarly, 63.2% of the coaches and referees who had witnessed inappropriate behaviour referred to examples of verbal abuse directed at children. Negative adult behaviours have been identified as a source of stress and anxiety for children participating in competitive sport (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984) and performance anxiety has been associated with reduced enjoyment of sport for both adults and children (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Smith & Smoll, 1990). The observations in this study found that over one in five comments made by coaches were negative. The impact of negative comments and criticism on children was apparent in the way the children interviewed in the focus groups indicated that a major dislike for them was being shouted at.

Janelle (age 6-8 years): When I was playing netball this lady, because she was one of my coaches, and she always used to shout when you did a mistake or something.

SW: So how did that make you feel when she said that?

Janelle: Sort of sad.

The impact of negative coaching behaviours is compounded for young children, as they often do not have the emotional resources and resilience needed to deal with criticism and negative feedback (McCarthy & Jones, 2007). The children interviewed indicated that the main effect of being yelled at was that it distracted them from the game and affected their concentration. Shouting at a child would appear to have the

opposite effect to that desired by the coach. Coaches are clearly shouting at the children as they are either making mistakes or not trying hard enough. The outcome, however, would not appear to be performance enhancement. In line with claims made in much of the coaching literature (Kidman, 2005; Martens, 2004), criticism of young athletes tends to have the opposite effect, and results in anxiety, stress, fear of failure, and has an adverse impact on both performance and enjoyment.

McCarthy and Jones (2007) referred to the ages of between 7 and 12 years as the sampling years, when children are experiencing new sports. Children's experiences during these formative years have been found to strongly influence their ongoing participation in sport as they move on to what McCarthy and Jones called the specialising ages (13 to 16 years). The children, aged 6 to 11 years, who were interviewed in this study, were already relating stories about withdrawing from certain sports, as in the case of Geoff (see Section 8), who had already stopped playing cricket because of the behaviour exhibited by his coach. The impact of excessive coach behaviour on a child's desire to continue with sport was also evidenced in the survey responses by parents:

Mother of 8-year old girl: A teenage [touch rugby] coach - took things way too seriously and treated 7-year olds like teenagers. My daughter wanted to quit but she didn't.

Mother of 10-year old boy: Very negative coach one year just about put him off playing the next season (rugby).

In the focus group interviews conducted with children, there was evidence that children were already accepting verbally abusive behaviour from coaches as a normalised occurrence associated with their sport. The following excerpt is from one of the focus group interviews with children aged 6 to 8 years. Tane had already expressed

that he did not like being shouted at by his coach and had talked about how his coach balanced the rugby union team out with 5 “bad” players and 5 “good” players:

SW: So how do you know if you’re a bad player or a good player?

Tane: I do. He’s only shouted at me twice.

SW: Does he just shout at the bad players?

Tane: Yeah

SW: Does that make them play better?

Tane: No.

SW: So if you were a coach would you shout at the bad players?

Tane: Only if they do bad things.

SW: Yeah, what’s a bad thing?

Tane: If someone passes to you and it’s a really good pass and you drop it.

That’s a bad thing.

The children interviewed in this study are already indicating that there is an acceptance of what is in effect abusive coach behaviour. It is acceptable to shout at “bad” players if they make mistakes.

The children interviewed understandably did not like being shouted at, it upset them, and adversely impacted upon their enjoyment of sport. This was a group of children who at this stage in their development quite simply loved playing sport. For them sport was primarily a source of fun, exhilaration, and joy. That some coaches could so adversely affect this innate enthusiasm and enjoyment to the extent that some of the children had already considered giving up sport, should be a major cause of concern for sporting organisations.

Over-competitive Coaching Behaviours: “Most of the time the boys are usually on for the longest”

The focus group conducted with sport administrators revealed a concern that a number of coaches were adopting practices that were driven by a win-at-all costs attitude which were to the detriment of a child’s all round development as a player. The findings of the focus group interviews with children reinforced the administrators’ concerns, revealing that a number of coaching practices which focused on the short term goal of winning each game were not uncommon. These practices included instances of more skilled players getting longer game time, boys getting more game time than girls, and children not being exposed to different positions on the field of play.

The two strongest themes to emerge from the children’s focus group interviews were that sport should be fun, and that it should be fair. The importance of being treated fairly supports the findings of other sporting studies that have been conducted with children (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005). Although winning was identified as a source of enjoyment for many children, the children interviewed clearly felt that this should not be achieved at the expense of children being treated fairly. In one example, Ben (age 9 to 11 years) talked about his rugby union experiences:

Ben: They keep on the really fast ones, they put the fast ones on for 5 minutes then they take them off and then they put them on again.

SW: So if you’re fast do you play more than the slower kids?

Ben: Yeah, because they are the best.

The children did not like being treated differently. Probably the worst example of discrimination was recounted by Annie (age 6 to 8 years), who perceived that boys were given longer game time than girls in her mixed touch rugby team (see Section 8).

Being treated fairly was important and the children didn't mind being on the sideline if it was their turn.

Many of the children interviewed also expressed a desire to try different positions, and the children were supportive of coaches who rotated their positions. But there was evidence, especially for the older age group interviewed (9 to 11 years), that a number of coaches kept players in the same position:

SW: What about positions, do you play in the same positions all of the time?

Dave (age 9-11 years): Mostly I'm a winger.

Jan: This year in netball we have our own positions. We just stay in the same positions.

Joe: My team changes every half time.

SW: Does the coach change your positions?

Joe: Yeah.

SW: So what do you think is the best, do you think it's best to stay in one position or try different positions?

Joe: It's good to try being different positions. We don't get bored.

A number of researchers have been critical of coaches who focus more on competition than on the development of young players' skills, which should be nurtured in a fun filled environment, offering challenge, excitement and variety (Brady, 2004). Coakley (1986) has suggested that children do not fully develop an understanding of the competitive process until 12 years of age, yet in this study evidence emerged that coaches of children under the ages of 12 consistently engaged in outcome driven practices.

Punishment: “It was your fault for the goal”

Evidence emerged that children were punished for making mistakes, or even for losing. This punishment took the form of being scolded, coaches using exercise as punishment for poor performances, and players being given less game time if they were perceived by the coach to be not as strong as other players. During the observations, there was also evidence on occasion of children being taken off the field of play after making a mistake. The actions of a soccer coach of a 9-year old boys’ team who had just conceded a goal are recounted below:

Coach (to other parent): God – let’s get him off - did you see that - he wasn't marking. That was Bob's fault. Let’s get him off.

Coach (to player): Bob, Bob come off.

(Player comes off the field).

Coach: Bob, come here, you see you've got to mark up - you can't leave a man unmarked.

Bob: Am I going back on?

Coach: We'll see, we'll see. We've got a bit of time yet.

A couple of minutes later the coach called Bob over again to explain to him why he had been taken off:

Coach: You see that goal, that was because you weren't marking. It's not your fault - you are still learning. But it was your fault for the goal. The thing is Bob, you are good going forward. But in a game like this, you've got to watch your man. You are still learning, you are still improving. You'll get more time in other games, but I can't put you back on in a game like this. You might cost us a goal. Is that ok? Do you understand? Good lad.

The coach continued watching the game, seemingly happy that he had done the right thing by explaining to his player the reasons he had taken him off. The young boy wandered over to his mother with tears in his eyes.

Children's perception of their level of competence in a physical activity affects their ongoing interest in that activity (Harter, 1987). The coach's actions here would have done little to contribute to the child's perception relating to his own ability. Critical feedback from coaches has been associated with a fear of failure and performance anxiety (Smith et al., 2007). Smith et al. noted that coaches are able to strongly influence the motivational climate for young athletes through their communication of goal priorities (for example skill development or winning and losing). In the instance observed, the coach was communicating that the most important goal was winning, which was of such importance that this athlete would play no further part in that day's game.

Background Anger

As discussed in Sections 7 and 9 the effect of witnessing incidents of background anger can be distressing for children (Cummings, 1987; Omli & La Voi, 2009). All aspects of this study revealed evidence of aggressive adult behaviours that would be witnessed by children. During an observation of a coach at a 10-year old boys' rugby union game, an argument broke out between the coach and a touch judge (another parent) over a decision the touch judge had made. The two groups of forwards were by this stage standing next to the touch judge waiting for a line-out to resume the game. A heated argument followed between the coach and touch judge, during which time the touch judge repeatedly swore at the coach. The altercation finally ended when a young player eventually told the touch judge to "leave it out mate". Omli and La Voi noted that the witnessing of aggressive behaviour that occurs between two adults,

especially between males, has the potential to be significantly distressing for young children.

A number of the children interviewed believed that their own coaches were extremely supportive, but they reported that they apparently regularly observed adults shouting at either children or referees.

SW: Have you ever seen people shouting on the touchlines?

Kath (age 6-8 years): I've heard it heaps.

SW: You've heard it heaps have you?

Kath: Because when we're playing against good players for the finals or the semis, they shout really hard.

SW: So when it gets to a final or semi-final do they shout more?

Kath: Yeah.

SW: Why do you think they want to do that?

Kath: Because so we can get more confident and they get scared more.

SW: How does it make you feel when you hear them shouting?

Kath: Nervous.

Although under 9 years of age, Kath already feels that shouting is a regular occurrence in her sport. She also alludes to the competitive nature of the behaviour as she claims that the finals of the competitions are characterised by even greater degrees of shouting. The comment that the behaviour is designed to scare opponents offers an insight into the perspective young children have about some adult behaviour on the touchlines. The perspective, that their behaviour is frightening to children, would appear to be one that has not been considered by adults engaging in these behaviours.

Athlete-centred Coaching

It was apparent from the systematic observation, that the coaches observed offered considerable instruction to the children during their games, with 41.5% of all

recorded comments being instructional. Instruction is a form of augmented feedback, that is, feedback that is outside the individual's own feedback system, and it has been argued that this type of feedback can be beneficial to learning (Blom & Drane, 2008). However, if this feedback is offered during play it can have a negative impact on learning, can be confusing to children especially, and interferes with decision-making processes and skill development (Blom & Drane, 2008; Kidman et al., 1999).

With the majority of comments made by the coaches observed being instructional in nature, coaches in all sports predominantly adopted a command style of coaching. Martens (2004) has defined a command style of coaching as one where all decisions are made by the coach.

The role of the athlete is to respond to the coach's commands. The assumption underlying this approach is that because the coach has knowledge and experience, it is the coach's role to tell the athlete what to do. The athlete's role is to listen, to absorb, and to comply. (Martens, 2004, p. 30)

It has been argued that this command style of coaching is predominantly coach-centred as opposed to being athlete or child-centred. An athlete-centred approach to coaching is a style that encourages and empowers players to become autonomous decision makers (de Souza & Oslin, 2008; Kidman et al., 1999). A similar approach has been advocated in the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) model designed by Bunker and Thorpe (1982), and its Australian variant Game Sense (Light, 2004). One of the driving forces behind the development of TGfU was a concern that children were being developed as coach dependent performers (Bunker & Thorpe, 1986). Coaches adopting a TGfU or Game Sense approach use questions to stimulate problem solving and thinking as opposed to simply instructing players to follow a command. Claims relating to the benefits of an athlete-centred approach to coaching include an increase in

player engagement; increased competence; and increased motivation (de Souza & Oslin, 2008; Kidman, 2005).

Although patterns and frequencies of comments made varied, all 72 of the coaches observed adopted a command style of coaching. As they played, children were consistently told what to do, and praised if they did well, and told off if they made a mistake. During 6-year olds' soccer, both teams' coaches are allowed on the field of play, and allowed to coach on the field. One soccer coach of a mixed 6-year olds' team got so frustrated with one of his players who was not moving into the correct position that he picked the player up and physically carried him forward about 20 metres into the 'correct' position. The following excerpt represents a fairly typical sequence of coach comments during a 10-year old boys' rugby union game:

Coach: Support him, support him. Support him, support him. Harry, get up there and support him. Come on Harry! Tackle [team name]. Round the legs, round the legs. COME ON! That's it. Good tackle Tony. That's more like it. Turn it, turn it. Awww, come on. You have to tackle low, around the legs.

This coach, as with many coaches observed, instructed the children throughout the game, offering praise and criticism whenever he felt it was warranted. The impact of this type of behaviour on children's enjoyment of sport was revealed in the findings of the focus group interviews conducted with children. The children stated that if they tried to listen to either the coach or parents, they tended to get confused, which often led them to make mistakes. They also noticed the effect these instructional adult behaviours had on other children:

Kath (age 9-11 years): I was playing touch and it was a girl's first time and she didn't know which way to run and her parents kept on yelling at her. She ran backwards and then she ran sideways and then she ran forwards.

SW: How old was she then when she was playing?

Kath: She was my age, I'm 9. It was her first time.

The results from the focus groups conducted with children here would appear to support the claims by Kidman (2005), de Souza and Oslin (2008), and Martens (2004), that an instructional or command style of coaching does not create an optimal learning environment for children. Little evidence emerged that children enjoyed being constantly told what to do.

The only phase of this study where the significance of sport as fun emerged was with the children themselves. They play sport primarily because it is enjoyable, a source of excitement and fun. The sports administrators acknowledged this, but viewed sport primarily as a vehicle for the long term development of players. Many coaches however, would appear to view children's sport as primarily a competitive activity, where winning is fundamentally the most important aspect.

SECTION 11: Future Directions

The normalised acceptance of children's sport as a highly competitive, structured activity which mirrors the adult sport model is a societal issue that has been debated in a number of countries. In the Scandinavian countries, for example, there has been considerable debate for a number of years about the role and function of children's sport, especially in relation to the role of competition (Støckel, Strandbu, Solenes, Jørgensen, & Fransson, 2010). Støckel et al. noted that the Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian governments have all invested heavily in projects and initiatives focusing on the promotion of children's sport. All three governments have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, with the Norwegian government drawing up regulations for children's sport based on the Convention. This wider societal debate about the role of competition in children's sport is one that does not appear to be happening to the same level in New Zealand.

It would appear that it is the focus on competition that drives the often harmful adult behaviours at children's sporting events. In New Zealand, there is no evidence of the same level of governmental concern, investment, and involvement that has been demonstrated, for example, in Scandinavia. Although offered guidelines, sporting organisations are very much left to their own devices. The RSO for netball in the region where this study was situated had implemented some strategies to attempt to improve spectator behaviour. Members of a task-force patrolled the netball centre where the coach observations were conducted, monitoring sideline behaviour. The RSO responsible for the organisation of rugby union in the same region has also implemented a number of strategies to try and address issues related to over-competitive coaching and parental behaviour. They have introduced what they refer to as *non-competitive*

sport, with no official recording of results, no points awarded for winning, and no league tables maintained. The three other sports that were the focus of this study all had competitive structures in place. In spite of the rugby initiatives, the observation of coaches across all sports revealed that rugby union coaches recorded significantly lower percentages of positive comments and the highest percentage of negative comments. The percentage of negative comments directed at referees was also significantly higher in rugby union and touch rugby than in netball and soccer.

It is now almost thirty years since Thomson (1984) voiced concerns over young children's experiences in organised sport when he delivered a keynote address at a national coaching conference. It is fifteen years since Kidman and McKenzie's (1996) study highlighted the excesses of parental behaviour at children's sporting events. The findings of this study do nothing to suggest that in 2011 these behaviours, and as a consequence the sporting experiences of children, are any different. This research builds on the findings of Kidman and colleagues (Kidman & McKenzie, 1996; Kidman et al., 1999) and there is now an evidence base to show a need for strategies that target the behaviours of both coaches and parents.

A fundamental problem with children's sport would appear to be its reliance on largely untrained volunteers. Jones (2007) has highlighted the complex pedagogical nature of coaching. How can we realistically expect volunteers to be good coaches with very little or no training? The analysis of the dynamics of power relationships in children's sport in this study supports previous research that indicates the powerful influences coaches can have on children participating in organised sport (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006). However, coaching interventions have shown that the behaviour of coaches can be changed (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Smith & Smoll, 1997). With an estimated 93% of primary school aged children being exposed at some stage to

organised sport in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 1997), it would appear to be fundamentally important that sporting organisations provide better support for coaches. Coaches are not only ideally placed to directly influence children's sporting experiences, their behaviour has also been perceived to set the tone, and influence the behaviour of parent spectators (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). An often cited recommendation for coaches is that they conduct parent meetings at the onset of the season, to establish codes of acceptable behaviour (Martens, 2004). Again, this would appear to put significant onus on the largely untrained, volunteer coach.

During the time period of this study, there have been a number of initiatives introduced that are designed to promote greater awareness of child-centred coaching practices. There is now a national resource framework (the Coach Development Framework), which is designed to provide guidance for NSOs to assist them in the development of their coach education programmes (Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2006). A number of resources have been provided to help NSOs in this area. The NZ CoachApproach is an example of one such resource (Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2010a). The philosophical underpinning of the NZ CoachApproach is athlete-centred and supports the New Zealand Coaching Strategy and Coach Development Framework, with the overall aim of developing athletes who are independent, self-motivated learners. An NZ CoachApproach DVD designed to be used in coaching workshops was distributed to NSOs and other organisations (such as tertiary institutes) involved in sport and coach education.

A recently launched initiative by New Zealand Football, entitled the Whole of Football, has an initial focus on junior soccer (ages 4 to 12 years) (New Zealand Football, 2011). For the first time in soccer in New Zealand, a nationwide programme will be implemented that will deliver coach education for all volunteer coaches involved

with this age group, and training and games will be tailored to cater for the age-specific developmental needs of children. The junior phase of this programme is due to be piloted in 2011, and is to be implemented nationwide in 2012.

While recognising that much of this work is ongoing, the findings of this study would suggest that, at this point in time, many of the volunteer coaches involved in primary school-aged children's organised team sports have still not been exposed to coach education initiatives. More worryingly, if they have been exposed there is little evidence that these initiatives are having the desired effect.

The findings of this study are currently being used by a Sideline Behaviour working group involving representatives from five RSOs, three RSTs, GACU, and two educational institutes. The purpose of the group is to generate increased awareness of the effects of over-competitive sideline behaviours and the data is being used to provide an evidence base to inform the current development of interventions designed to enhance the enjoyment for children participating in organised team sports.

However, it seems unlikely that a number of sporting organisations themselves have sufficient resources to implement large scale coaching interventions. Additionally, any interventions implemented will be inconsistently applied across different sports, and even across different regions within sports. SPARC, as the Crown Entity responsible for sport and recreation, would appear to be the only organisation capable of insisting upon the implementation of athlete-centred coaching initiatives. Although the athlete-centred language used in their strategy documents (Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2004, 2006) is commendable, the focus has been on building sport-specific coach development programmes. While this approach has merits in that it advocates a focus on the ongoing development of coaches at all levels, and on the needs of athletes, there

is little evidence from the observed behaviour that this approach has filtered down to volunteer coaches of young children.

The competitive discourse dominates the world of children's sport. Although much of the language used by policy-makers, and by sporting organisations themselves, reflects an athlete-centred developmental approach to children's sport, many of the structures in place reflect a competitive structure. As the rugby union administrator interviewed noted:

[...] our biggest problem throughout it all is that we as adults, and our volunteers and parents, superimpose adult structures and competition structures on the kids.

There are many good coaches involved in children's sport. They voluntarily donate considerable time and energy to ensure that children are provided the opportunity to engage in sport. However, coaches of young children need to be regularly exposed to coach education that can at least enhance their awareness of some of the issues related to working with young children. Coach education, although important, will not act as a simple 'silver bullet' for this issue. The feeling that children's sport is fundamentally an activity focused primarily on winning is deeply entrenched. Children's sport is adult-controlled; for many involved adults, sport is primarily about competition, as was reflected in the adult behaviour witnessed in this study.

Until the experiences of children participating in sport becomes a priority, as opposed to a concern, children will continue to be exposed to what would appear to be the normalised adult behaviours driven by a win-at-all-costs mentality. Even slight modifications to the approaches adopted by coaches can have a major impact on

children. These are just young children who predominantly want to have fun, actively participate, and be treated equally.

John (aged 6 to 8 years): It's like I never get anything, because I like, never do. It's like I'm trying my best all the time but I never get anything.

SW (Interviewer): What do you mean you never get anything?

John: There's always like three players of the day. They get a prize like a Subway voucher, a Video voucher, or a food voucher. I try my hardest but I get nothing.

Sorry John, but trying hard just doesn't cut it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire – Parents and Children

Children and their sport: A questionnaire



Please read the enclosed information sheet then complete this questionnaire. There are two sections – one to be completed by the child, and one by the parent/caregiver.

PART 1:

To be filled out by the child (with help if you need it from your parent/caregiver)

Your name: _____ Your school: _____

How old are you: _____ What is your School year: _____

Please put a circle around the right answer to each question below

Are you a boy or girl?

Boy

Girl

Which team sports do you play? (Circle all the sports you play)

Touch	Netball	Soccer	Rugby	Hockey
League	Cricket	Basketball	Other	I don't play sport

When you play your team games, how often do you play?

Every or most weeks	Sometimes	Not very often
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How much do you enjoy playing team sports?

A lot	Quite a lot	It's ok	I don't like it much	I don't like it at all
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Thank you for your important answers.

***Your mum or dad/caregiver will complete the other side of this
form.***

PART 2: To be completed by the parent/caregiver

What is your relationship to the child?

Please put a circle around the answer to each question

If your child participates in organised team sport:

Do you attend your child's training sessions?

Always

Most times

Sometimes

Rarely

Do you attend your child's matches/competitions?

Always

Most times

Sometimes

Rarely

Do you think participating in sport is important for your child?

Yes

No

I'm not sure

What positive experiences have you ever had with your child's organised sport?

What negative experiences have you ever had with your child's organised sport?

Have other parents ever negatively affected your child's enjoyment of their sport?

Yes

No

If yes, in what way?

There will be a follow-up study briefly interviewing small groups of children about their experience of sport. If your child is eligible for this study, would you like to receive more information about it?

If so, can you please include your name and preferred method of contact below (i.e. email/telephone/postal address) or contact the lead researcher Simon Walters directly (telephone: (09) 921 9999 extension 7022, email: simon.walters@aut.ac.nz)?

Name:

Contact details:

That's great! Thanks for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. Please ask your child to bring it back to school with the completed Assent and Consent forms within 2 weeks.

Appendix B: Survey – Referees and Coaches

Children and sport Survey - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.sportsurvey.co.nz/survey/TakeSurvey.asp?PageNumber=1&SurveyID=650993036725G

Children and sport Survey

Children and sport

Page 1 of 1

1. Are you male or female?*
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

2. What is your age?*
- ☐ 16-20
- ☐ 21-30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 51-60
- ☐ 60+

3. Are you a coach or referee/umpire?
- ☐ Coach
- ☐ Referee/Umpire
- ☐ Both

4. Which children's (ages 6-11) team sports do you coach/referee?*
- Select at least 1 response.
- ☐ Touch ☐ Netball ☐ Soccer ☐ Rugby ☐ Hockey ☐ League ☐ Cricket ☐ Basketball ☐ Softball
- ☐ Other, please specify

Children and sport Survey - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.sportsurvey.co.nz/survey/TakeSurvey.asp?PageNumber=18&SurveyID=3316p303m54k1

Children and sport Survey

5. How many years coaching/refereeing experience do you have?*

☐ 0 - 1

☐ 2 - 3

☐ 4 - 5

☐ 6 or more

6. During the season, how often do you coach or referee?*

☐ More than once a week

☐ Every or most weeks

☐ Sometimes

☐ Not very often

7. Have you ever witnessed what you consider to be inappropriate parental or parent-coach touchline behaviour?*

☐ Never

☐ Once or twice ever

☐ Once or twice a season

☐ Several times a season

☐ Regularly

8. If yes, in what way?

Next Cancel

Children and sport Survey - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.sportsurvey.co.nz/survey/TakeSurvey.asp?SurveyID=401363033n65G8&PreviousActualPageNumber=1&PreviousDisplayPageNumber=1&PreviousQuestionNumber=1

Children and sport Survey

Live Search

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Children and sport

9. Do you have concerns about parental behaviour at children's sporting events?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

10. If yes, what steps do you think could be taken to improve parental behaviour?

Back Done Cancel